

DOCTORAL THESIS

A critical realist exploration of the comparative impact on successful first generation and non-first generation graduates of a programme of change aimed at enhancing employability

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Award date:
2014

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

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A critical realist exploration of the comparative impact
on successful first generation and non-first generation
graduates of a programme of change aimed at enhancing
employability

by

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2013

ABSTRACT

The research presented in this thesis relates to an aspect my practice setting as an Associate Dean in a large and diverse Faculty in a post-92 University. The issue investigated relates to the contribution made by a series of employability enhancements, introduced as part of a curriculum review in 2005-06, to a four year upward trend in the Faculty's Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) statistics. The enhancements included a number of initiatives at both University and Faculty level. However of particular concern at Faculty level was the growing evidence in the literature of the specific needs of first generation students, who constitute a significant proportion of the Faculty's students. Therefore some of the enhancement initiatives introduced had these students particularly in mind.

However although an exploration of the effectiveness of the employability enhancements provides the practice context the main contribution of the research arises from the methodology adopted. The research takes an overtly critical realist view and argues that, for managers looking to make practice enhancements, the perspective provides a much richer basis than more traditional outcome based approaches. The method used was to develop from previous research an employability social structure and then explore, through semi-structured interviews, the experiences of ten 'successful' graduates. Through the process of deconstruction and reconstruction the data was explored from a number of angles to address the main research objectives. However what is also demonstrated is how, by the development of a critical realist approach, I am able to identify specific practice improvements which are both evidence-based and contextually relevant.

From a broader view critical realism offers a pluralist approach to research which is problem-led in the sense that you commence with an issue or problem and work down to a supporting discourse and research method. The argument is made that this is also a particularly used approach for practice-based research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this research has been helped and supported by a number of people. Firstly a big thanks to my supervisory team, Lynn Lim, Penny Burke but in particular to Anthony Thorpe. Anthony's diplomatic but supportive, and persistent, probing as what the purpose and nature of the research was has lead me down a research journey I could not have envisaged at the outset. I also would like to acknowledge the support of my current Dean, Denise Skinner, and former Dean, Dave Noon. Without their support in allowing me leave of absence for concentrated blocks of time I simply could not have completed the writing of the thesis. Lastly, but by no means least, I have to thank my long suffering wife, Denise, for putting up (again) with lost weekends and intrusion on holidays that she had to suffer.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2 – The Theoretical Basis to the Employability Debate	25
Chapter 3 – The Social Structure Relating to Employability	47
Chapter 4 – Methodology	74
Chapter 5 – Analysis and Discussion: A Critical realist Exploration of the Employability Social Structure	106
Chapter 6 - Conclusion : Critical Realism as a basis for Research-based Management Research	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY	179

APPENDICIES

Appendix 1 – Ethics Documents

Appendix 2 – a. Pen Portraits of the Interviewees
b. The Interview Schedule

Appendix 3 – Transcripts of the Interviews

Appendix 4 – Summaries of the Interview Data

Appendix 5 – Faculty DLHE Data

Appendix 6 – Faculty Employability Policy Papers

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

3.1 – CHERI factors associated with successful employment outcomes...	54
3.2 - Contextual Elements of the Social Structure	60
4.1 – Sample Selection Data	96
5.1 – Summary of impact	124
5.2 - Degree and Degree Class	126

5.3 - Indirect Enabling variable - Add+vantage modules	128
5.4 - Indirect Enabling variable - Employability Learning Package (ELP).....	131
5.5 - Indirect Enabling variable - Career Development Modules	132
5.6 - Indirect Enabling variable – the University Careers Service	135
5.7 - Indirect Enabling variable - Course-based employability skills	137
5.8 – Indirect Enabling variable - Relevant work experience whilst at University	141
5.9 – Job Search Techniques used by interviewees	149
5.10 - Actual Graduate Ideal-type Orientations	164

Figures

3.1 – The CHERI framework of determinants of success in the labour market	64
3.2 – The Social Structure of Employability.....	65
3.3 - Ideal-type of student	71
4.1 – The realist evaluation cycle	75
4.2 – Framework for realist	77
4.3 – The generic CMO of the research	78
4.4 – Impact of a programme of change	79
4.5 - FG and NFG CMO configuration	80
4.6 – CMO Configuration for research	81
4.7 – The USEM model of Employability	83

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The area of educational practice with which this thesis is concerned is undergraduate employability. Unlike previous research in the area though, discussed at length in chapters 2 and 3, I approached the issue from the perspective of a senior manager of a large and diverse Faculty within a Post-92 Midlands University faced with the responsibility for improving graduate destinations across the Faculty. Thus although previous research provides a supporting structure of concepts and perspectives underpinning aspects of this thesis, the main focus is the real practice concern of moving the Faculty's positive destinations towards a set University (and personal) performance target. Specifically the context of the research concerns the effectiveness of a range of employability enhancements introduced in 2006 as a means of supporting students in making a successful transition into a graduate level job. However, for reason which will be explored in the rest of this chapter, through the process of developing an appropriate approach to address the main practice concern around employability the focus of the research shifted.

At the outset it is appropriate to make a few comments regarding my own personal and professional background. My academic discipline area is Economics which, as will be discussed in the next section, was a factor in how my approach to the research developed. However having spent 11 years as Head of a Business department and the last 7 as an Associate Dean for a very diverse Faculty I have been exposed to a wide range of discipline areas. This has proved to be useful in developing the research which, for reasons discussed in section 1.2, is based on a multidisciplinary approach.

A secondary motivation behind the original research project has a more personal aspect. Many of the issues raised by the literature explored in chapter 3 relate to the potential labour market barriers faced by first generation graduates and subsequent difficulties they may have in accessing the graduate labour market. As a first generation graduate I can personally relate to the issues raised. On graduation I had no real idea what opportunities were open to me as a graduate and had certainly

given very little thought about my own employability and work readiness. This experience further strengthens my personal commitment to trying to ensure that first generation graduates today are supported in making a successful transition into a graduate level job which meets their own aspirations. As will be discussed in the next section many of the Faculty's students are first generation students and this was a key factor in developing the employability enhancements in 2006.

The layout of the rest of this chapter follows my research trajectory from the identification of the original practice issue to be investigated to the final formulation of the research aim and objectives.

1.1 THE PRACTICE CONTEXT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Undergraduate student employability has been a major area of concern for policy and research over the last 10 years and is used by the Government as one of the key measures of a University's performance. The measure used by the Government to assess a University's performance arises from the Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) survey which is overseen by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), although the actual data collection process is through the market research company IPSO-MORI. The survey is carried out 6 months after graduation with all HEFCE funded students being surveyed by means of a questionnaire (initially postal but with a follow-up telephone call for non-responders). The main purpose of the DLHE survey is to use the graduate's responses to place them into one of several categories based on what they will be doing on the census date (a fixed date in the middle of January). The two key categories for University performance indicators are those defined as being in a 'graduate level job' and those deemed to have achieved a 'positive destination', an extension to include graduates who progress on to post-graduate courses.

The DLHE process is open to criticism, and the measure can be regarded as something of a blunt instrument. However the data is one of the key course indicators currently available to potential students through the Unistats database (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>) and is accessible directly from the University admissions system UCAS (<http://www.ucas.com/>). In the new funding regime from 2012 onwards the DLHE data will form part of the Key Information Set (KIS). All

universities will be required to publish KIS data at a course level as part of the information provided for prospective applicants.

My current role is as Associate Dean for student experience in the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society (BES) in a post-92 Midland University. The Faculty has about 7,000 students and covers a wide-range of subject areas: the Business School, the Law School, English, Languages, Geography, Politics, History, Sociology, Disaster Management and International Relations. One of my areas of responsibility within the Faculty is employability with a current target of raising positive destinations for our students from 61% for the 2010 graduates to 80% for 2015 graduates. The University first set a positive destinations target in 2005 and instigated a number of changes to course structures and curriculum for the 2006/07 cohort to support achieving the 70% target which had been set for 2010. To complement the changes at University level I also introduced a number of additional interventions at Faculty level aimed at enhancing our student's employability on graduation. The changes introduced at Faculty level were partly guided by the work of the ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) who developed a holistic framework (USEM) covering both curriculum and co-curriculum aspects of a student's experience whilst at University (the ESECT papers can be found at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm>).

The other factor behind the approach to employability enhancements adopted by the Faculty was a response to research evidence accumulating at the time on the main factors which impact on a student being successful in achieving a graduate level job (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; HEFCE, 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Smetherham, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Very broadly all the evidence from this previous research pointed to the following being the key impact factors:

1. Institution attended
2. Degree subject
3. Degree Class
4. Relevant work experience
5. Factors within a students' social and biographical background.

Factors 1 and 2 are essentially fixed by the student through choices made before arriving at the University. On a superficial level factor 3 revolves around a student's innate abilities and the quality of the teaching and learning experience. However widening participation (WP) research suggests that there are also a range of other factors relating to a student's background and the nature of the institution attended (see, for example, Reay, 2004; Reay, Ball and David, 2006; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009 and 2010, Crozier and Reay, 2011). Factor 4 was addressed by the Faculty with significant resources being put into establishing a central Faculty work placement unit (the Employability and Placement Unit (EPU)) plus Departments being provided with staffing resource to support work experience initiatives at the course level.

Much more challenging to address was the final factor. The research evidence showed that a whole range of factors in a student's personal and social background can impact on their being successful in the graduate labour market: gender, ethnicity, age and sex. However one key factor of particular relevance for students entering my own Faculty is whether they have immediate family with experience of higher education. The exact figure is difficult to obtain as students are not required to disclose this information on their UCAS application form, however internal University estimates put the proportion at about 65% for the University as a whole. For my own Faculty the figure is likely to be higher for the courses within the Business School (the focus of this research project) as traditionally business courses have attracted higher proportions of first generation students. The Bourdieusian tradition on which much of the research in this area is based (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) suggests that these first generation students may be at a disadvantage when it comes to making a successful transition into a graduate level job. For Bourdieu immediate family experience of higher education plays an important role in the development of the cultural capital and social capital needed to make a successful transition into a graduate job.

The original principal motivation behind undertaking this research project was to assess the impact of the employability enhancements introduced in 2006 on students' making successful transitions into graduate level jobs. However of particular interest was whether the impact had been more beneficial for first generation graduates given

that many of the enhancements had these students specifically in mind when they were put in place.

One obvious start point was to examine the DLHE data for the Faculty (see appendix 5). The overall figure for the Faculty has shown a four year upward trend which, given the deterioration in the external economy, is a significant achievement. However this overall improvement could be due to a wide range of factors not directly related to the employability enhancements, plus the variation between the Departments shows that the improvement has not been uniform across the Faculty.

Therefore taking all of the above points into consideration there is a strong practice need for me to explore the issue of the effectiveness of the employability enhancements. From a practice perspective 'effectiveness' refers to whether the employability enhancements had any impact on students making a successful transition into a graduate level job as defined by the DHLE survey. However what I was also particularly interested in is whether the enhancements did actually mitigate some of the factors which previous research suggested worked against first generation students.

My initial approach in designing the research project was to draw on the familiar positivists' methods of my own Economics background. In reviewing the previous research (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; HEFCE, 2001; Smetherham, 2006) there was a clear indication of a set of underlying causal relationships which could be taken as an implicit model of employability. My intention was therefore to firstly construct this model from the previous research. Secondly I intended using data sets, such as that presented in appendix 5, as the basis for undertaking a comparative analysis of the last cohort of students graduating before the employability enhancements against the first cohort who experienced the employability enhancements.

However as the research progressed I realised that there were a number of factors which made this positivist approach unsatisfactory as a research method. On a practical level I quickly realised that the data on which the research would need to be based was not very reliable. In addition it would not allow me to easily undertake the

comparison between first generation (FG) and non-first generation (NFG) graduates. The data reliability became a further issue as the University began to take a closer interest in the DLHE stats and a significantly enhanced effort was put into collecting and checking the data. This made the comparison of data on a year by year basis less reliable. On the second point it proved to be difficult to identify FG and NFG graduates purely from student records as this information is only given voluntarily on their UCAS form. The use of postcode information was considered but rejected as too blunt an instrument.

On a different level I also became concerned that undertaking a statistical analysis as outlined above would not actually be of much use from a practice enhancement perspective. The results might give me some general idea about how effective the employability enhancements may have been but would be of little use in helping to enhance and develop specific aspects of our employability support for students. The only way to understand this was to talk to graduates who had experienced the enhancements and assess their perception of the impact they had on achieving their successful transition into a graduate level job.

Therefore the decision was taken to adopt a more qualitative approach to the data collection using interviews with graduates. This was an approach previously used by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) and Tomlinson (2007) in their work on employability. However despite this approach being suggestive of relativist epistemology this was also rejected as an appropriate perspective for the research. The purpose of the research was not to construct an interpretist view of employability based on the graduates' experiences but to understand the impact of a series of employability enhancements. From this evaluation perspective the enhancements represent 'real' pre-existing entities with which the graduates have interacted. Similarly previous research suggests a set of wider pre-existing social structures, essentially beyond the direct control of each individual, which also impacts on a student's eventual graduate destination. Therefore in general terms the evaluation needed to adopt a deductive approach based on existing identified social structures and concepts (such as 'employability') which were already present rather than an inductive approach trying to create new entities.

I therefore came to realise that the combination of external ‘real’ entities and their potential impact on an individual’s actions and decision making was actually consistent with an epistemology based on critical realism. The next section will explore this critical realist perspective more deeply and consider further why this perspective was adopted for the evaluation of the employability enhancements.

1.2 THE CRITICAL REALIST BASIS TO THE RESEARCH

Although the previous section has begun to explore the nature of critical realism providing a succinct definition of what a ‘critical realist view’ actually means is difficult. As noted by Sayer when faced with the same problem:

“Particular philosophies are not simple and self-contained but exist through their opposition to a range of alternative positions they involve loose bundles of arguments weaving tortuously across wider fields of philosophical discourse” (Sayer, 1992, p.5).

Adopting the Sayer approach it is useful to continue the discussion begun in the last section on contrasting the critical realist perspective with the two traditional opposing views on the nature of social reality, namely the positivist and relativist views. The positivist approach assumes that the object of research is directly observable with an independent existence and the knowledge generated from the research can be acquired and transferred. This research methodology is derived from the application of the methods developed for researching into the physical world and makes the assumption that the social world can be investigated using the same methods. The researcher becomes an analyst and interpreter of the social world and what is happening around them. Like in the physical world by, normally, using quantitative research methodologies the researcher can produce generalised predictions on which future behaviour can be based. As discussed at the end of the previous section this is the tradition I came from as an Economist and was the viewpoint from which I started thinking about my research design.

The alternative relativist’s perspective is to assume that the object of research cannot be objectively defined, but is a subjective part of our consciousness, and interacts

and alters the world around us. From this perspective “we each inhabit subjective worlds of meaning through which we interpret the social world. Indeed, that social world is nothing more than our interpretations” (Pring, 2004, p.98). Thus, from the relativist perspective, if we are to understand the world then this should include consideration of the individuals who are part of the action being researched. Therefore the research methods used tend to be qualitative, producing non-generalisable results as each time the research is done the context, actors and researchers differ, hence their interpretations differ.

The critical realist view (as represented by Outhwaite, 1987; Sayer 1992 and 2000; Bhaskar, 1998 and 2008; Lawson, 1998; Lewis, 2000; Scott, 2005 and 2007) of social reality lies somewhere between these two extremes incorporating elements of both. Pring (2000) sees critical realism as a bridge between the ‘false duality’ of the positivist- relativist divide in research methodology.

The positivist element in critical realism arises from the acceptance that there is a ‘real’ world of social structures which exists independently of the people within the particular social structure. As put by Lewis; “In critical realist parlance, there is an “ontological hiatus” between pre-constituted social structure, inherited “already formed” from the past, and the practices of agents in the present” (Lewis, 2000, p. 250-51). The implication is that any actions taken by individuals in the present are, in part, going to be constrained by existing social structures which are the result of actions taken in the past. Further actions taken now become part of that social structure and will influence and constrain actions in the future.

Bhaskar (1998 and 2008) has played a central role in developing the critical realist perspective. He develops a view of a society which contains ‘structures, practices and conventions’ (Bhaskar, 1998, p.36) which pre-define specific social structures. The ‘structures, practices and conventions’ can refer to both the tangible legal, political and organisational institutions that exist within a society, and also the less tangible ethical, moral and general societal attitude and structures that a society reflects. Pring (2004) refers to these entities as identifiable “social facts” which clearly exist and are not simply socially constructed. However a social structure has no independent agency, it is only reproduced and developed through the actions of

individual agents interacting with the ‘social facts’. In addition the strong temporal basis to social reality means that actions and structures develop and evolve in a linear, but dynamic manner, through time.

The literature on employability referred to previously (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; HEFCE 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Smetherham, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) establishes a number of ‘social facts’ which appear to impact on employability (the literature will be discussed fully in chapter 3). When set alongside the institutions (schools, universities, and employing companies), embedded practices (such as those related to graduate recruitment or university entrance) and wider social attitudes a social structure surrounding employability begins to emerge. What is also apparent is that for individual agents the social structure has a clear linear temporal element with actions taken in the past impacting on future decisions and outcomes. Thus, based on previous research, the desired outcome of a graduate job is likely to have been influenced by, for example, decisions taken on which University to attend, which course to take and whether the course includes a sandwich year placement in industry.

It is important to recognise though, that critical realists do not take a deterministic view of individual agent’s behaviour; the social structure does not pre-determine in a positivist’s way the outcome of behaviour. An individual agent’s knowledge of the world is still socially constructed in an active relativist’s epistemological manner. However the social reality constructed will be influenced by the underlying social structures which individual agents may or may not be aware of. Aspects of the social structure which individual agents will be aware of are more likely to be the tangible institutions. However there may be less awareness of the influence of the more intangible elements of a social structure. Thus within the social structure surrounding employability the student will be aware of the university they attend, the course they are taking and the potential impact of their final degree class on future employment. However, as showed by previous research (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007), there tends to be less awareness of the possible impact of their social and biographical background on their employability.

The interdependence between structure and agency, and the resulting embeddedness of human action within pre-existing social structures, situates the critical realist view of social reality somewhere between the relativist's and positivist's assumption in relation to ontology and human nature. Critical realists recognise that, in a positivist sense, there are entities in the social world which have an independent existence outside of each individual agent's consciousness. However, as in relativism, individuals still have to make active choices about their actions. What the critical realist ontological perspective also recognises though is that these choices may well be constrained by existing social structures. Also, as in relativism, individual agents in making these choices construct their own reality however again this is a reality which reflects the underlying 'structure, practices and conventions' of the social structure. To be more precise the social reality they construct reflects the underlying *relationships* within the social structure: "critical realists draw upon the notion of underlying power structures that might not be conscious to people yet have influence on the production of social reality" (Kempster and Parry, 2011, p.110). Therefore students may be aware of the causal relationship between a good degree and success in the graduate labour market and their actions and view of the world will be influenced by this. However, the suggested potential causal relationship between their personal background and success in the graduate labour market may also have an unacknowledged but equally important impact.

At its core critical realist research is concerned with investigating the relationships between the elements of the underlying social structure and the causal impact these may have on the outcomes arising from an identified social system. Therefore, as with positivist research, critical realist research begins by assuming there is an underlying theoretical causal social structure which needs to be analysed and 'tested'. The purpose of the research may be to identify the relationships within a social structure by, for example, using the methods associated with grounded theory (see for example Kempster and Parry, 2011). Alternatively the researcher may hypothesise a set of causal relationships within a social structure based on previous research as the start point. My research is of the second type.

Epistemologically however the researcher needs to focus on the individual agents within a social structure and examine how they construct their social reality. Although, as already noted, this approach has much in common with relativist research method there are fundamental differences. In critical realist research the purpose is to understand the impact of the structures, and relationships between structures, on the social reality created by individual agents. As summarised by Kempster and Parry “For critical realists the scientific project is to understand and explain phenomena. Reality is seen as a result of causal powers.” (Kempster and Parry, 2011, p.107). Therefore if we are to understand the phenomena of ‘employability’ we need to identify the ‘causal powers’ which are impacting on employability. However within the critical realist perspective this needs to be done from the perspective of the graduates. We need to understand how they have created their employability within the surrounding social structure. More specifically, from a practice perspective, I need to evaluate the part that the employability enhancements played within their social construction of employability and the impact these may have had on achieving a graduate job.

The other major epistemological difference between critical realist and relativist is that although in the critical realist perspective knowledge is socially produced it is produced in reference to an underlying theoretical structure. As pointed out by Miller and Tsang “Because of the existence of an external referent, knowledge claims may be challenged and their merits assessed” (Miller and Tsang, 2011, p.144). In this sense critical realist epistemology shares some features with positivism in that the knowledge claims are based on underlying hypothesised social structures which are open to challenge and criticism. One of the objectives of this research project is to reflect on the Faculty’s approach to employability enhancement (section 1.4) with a view to making practice improvements. Without the underlying hypothesised social structure relating to employability this would not be possible to do. In other words a purely relativist approach to the research project would not allow for this practice-based objective to be met.

From the above discussion it is clear that a key consideration within critical realism is the causal impact which social structures can have on the outcome of a social structure for individual agents. However, within critical realism ‘causality’ is a more

complex concept than within the positivist perspective. Essentially causality for critical realists operates on more than one level. For the individual agent within the social system how they interpret and react to the elements within the social structure determines how they arrive at the outcome; we can trace a causal path through to the end outcome. However that causal pathway is to a large extent context dependent. By examining other agents' causal pathways, given the same context, we may identify similarities and therefore come to conclusions about causality within the social structure (referred to as 'regularities').

However unlike in positivist methodology we could not then extrapolate from this result to say the same causal effect will be observed in *all* contexts. Indeed we cannot even claim that the causal effect will always happen *within* the same context. At a deeper level however critical realists do recognise that some causal effects may be of a more generic nature (usually referred to as 'generative mechanisms') and are not context specific. The nature of causality is an area which will be returned to in chapters 2 and 3 where the rationale behind the critical realist view will be explored in full.

The next section considers how critical realism is being developed from a philosophical viewpoint to form a basis for applied research into specific issues.

1.3 CRITICAL REALISM AS A RESEARCH METHOD

Critical realism as a basis for research is still at an early stage of development. Much of the published work is concerned more with working through the implications and criticisms of critical realism from a philosophical stance (see, for example, Lewis, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005; Miller and Tsang, 2011; Kempster and Parry, 2011; Al-Amoudi and Willmott, 2011; Newton, Deetz and Reed, 2011). However one discipline area where the specific implications of a critical realism viewpoint have been more thoroughly developed is Economics. Lawson (1998) is a key figure in setting out some of the underlying principles of critical realism, but this was done from the basis his own discipline area of Economics. Following from this lead a number of economists have developed critical realist stances (Fleetwood, 2004 and 2005; Mearman, 2006 and Lewis 2009 being key examples). Given that many of

these economists have connections with Cambridge, Mearman (2006) has gone so far as to suggest an emerging 'Cambridge school' based on a critical realist view of Economics methodology.

This relationship between critical realism and Economics is actually important in the context of this research project for two reasons. As will be discussed in chapter 2 many of the accepted policy 'truths' about employability is driven by concepts and models drawn from orthodox economics. The policy discourse on the purpose of Higher Education rests on assumptions of an underlying 'knowledge-based economy' and growth based on developing 'human capital'. This follows through directly into the performance measure of employability (the DLHE measure) which is the main practice concern of my research. As will be discussed in section 2.3 this view has also impacted on the conceptualisation of employability which, from a critical realism viewpoint, leads to a decontextualised and generic view of employability which misses the essential uniqueness of each student's actual employability.

The second reason why the relationship between critical realism and Economics is of importance is more personal in nature. As discussed earlier my own discipline background is Economics and the adoption of methods used by Economists was my initial start point for designing the research. As also discussed earlier I however quickly moved away from this to a more qualitative approach rooted in critical realism. Reflecting on my own experience there are some interesting questions as to why of all the social science disciplines Economics seems to have been at the fore front in the debate over critical realism. One explanation may lie in the superficial similarity in approach to research design. The building of models to be tested, a concern with causal mechanisms leading to outcomes and the focus on individual behaviour gives critical realism research a familiar, almost comfortable feel for academics coming from an Economics background.

However there are crucial epistemological and ontological differences between critical realism and orthodox Economics research methods. The assumption of rational behaviour by agents within Economic models effectively imposes an ontological view on agents and allows for the focus to be on outcomes only. Within the critical realist approach ontology is central with an understanding of the way

agents interpret and make decisions being what is ‘tested’ not just the outcomes of the model (Lewis, 2009). Similarly for critical realist research the context is of central importance however for orthodox Economics results are context free. These are issues which will be explored in more depth in section 2.2.

Another key point to emphasis in relation to critical realism is that it is a philosophical view of reality and not a method of research. Many of Mearman’s ‘Cambridge school’ reflect the view that Economics is a discipline “...dominated by methods” (Mearman, 2006, p.54) aimed at quantifying pre-determined causal relationships. However for critical realists you start with an observed phenomenon and evidence of a causal relationship which research “... needs to identify and illuminate” (Lewis, 2009, p.111). In other words you start with an issue or outcome and work back. The phenomenon being considered in my research is the four year upward trend in the Faculty’s DLHE statistics. The starting point for the research was whether one of the causal factors within the social structure relating to employability was the enhancements introduced in 2006. In designing an appropriate research method Lewis (2009) suggests a multidisciplinary approach is adopted which draws on the most appropriate existing models, concepts and methods relevant to the phenomenon being investigated. As suggested by Lewis (2009) “The critical realist account of social science, as involving the identification of the underlying causal mechanisms that give rise to social phenomena of interest, embraces *all* the social sciences” (p. 112). Thus for my research although the policy view of employability is dominated by Economics, in constructing the social structure around employability (chapter 3) I have drawn on research rooted in both sociology and psychology.

Looking beyond Economics there is evidence of a growing interest in critical realism within the broad Management and Organisation literature (Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011; Newton, Deetz and Reed, 2011; Kempster and Parry, 2011; Miller and Tsang, 2011) and also Marketing (Easton, 2002 and 2010; Ryan et al, 2012). However as yet these tend to take the form of outlining critical realist philosophy and justifying its adoption within these discipline areas rather than actual application. Apart from Pawson and Tilley’s original work in the area of criminal justice (see also Hunt and Sridharan, 2010) for examples of actual applied research we need to look to the area of health policy. Within this area there is growing use of a critical realist approach,

in particular the Pawson and Tilley (1997) realist evaluation method used for my research (see for example Timmins and Miller, 2007; Wand, White and Patching, 2010; Ogrinc and Batalden, 2009; Whitelaw et al, 2010; Maluka et al, 2011; Pommier, Guével and Jourdan, 2010; Ranmuthugala et al, 2011).

In looking across the literature referred to above there are a number of features which reflect the nature of critical realism research as discussed previously. All share the common feature of being concerned with a programme of change being introduced into a pre-existing social structure and the desire to assess the impact. All also use the Pawson and Tilley methodology based on defining a Context-Mechanism-Outcome configuration (to be discussed in more depth in chapter 4). However what is also noticeable is the range of research methods adopted, reflecting Lewis's point in relation to critical realism allowing for the use of a range of research methods dependent on the particular needs of the researcher (Lewis, 2009). Thus there are examples of both quantitative studies (for example Hunt and Sridharan, 2010; Pommier, Guével and Jourdan, 2010) and a range of qualitative methods (for example Wand, White and Patching, 2010; Ranmuthugala et al, 2011, Van Belle et al, 2010) plus also mixed methods (Maluka et al, 2011). The other noticeable feature of this literature is the wide geographical spread with the approach being adopted by researchers from the North America, Europe, Australia and East Africa.

The obvious question to ask is why has the application of critical realism been so prominent in this particularly area and also the preference for the use of realist evaluation? Timmins and Miller (2007) offers the following explanation:

“Services such as education and health now require practitioners to be more accountable for what they do. Targets are set and evaluation will test whether they have been achieved ... practitioners are now extolled to ensure that their work is evidence-based ... but evidence is often highly context-related.” (p.9)

The use of realist evaluation is particularly effective for assessing the effects of policy change within the context outlined above. The focus on individuals in the search for mechanisms allows for the identification of differential affects which may or may not be related to contextual factors (such as on FG and NFG graduates) which are important from a practice improvement perspective. As originally

suggested by Pawson and Tilley (1997) we need to understand “what might work for whom and in what circumstances” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.85). Also, as discussed earlier, it offers the potential to identify ‘missing mechanisms’ which might not be evident from the original formulation of the social structure. Both these areas of importance to a practitioner would be missed by a more traditional positivist evaluation which focused entirely on outcomes. As pointed out by Pawson and Tilley (1997) “... people are a critical factor in any intervention in a social context and it is people that cause the programme to work, not the programme itself” (p. 10).

The other noticeable point about the Timmins and Miller (2007) quote is the reference to education and not just health. As set out at the start of this chapter my practice setting reflects many of the points made by Timmins and Miller particularly the focus on setting and achieving targets, the developing of an evidence-base for the enhancement of practice and the context specific nature of much policy implementation. However, little research has been done on applying the realist evaluation method to education outside the area of health education (Ogrinc and Batalden, 2009; Pommier, Guével and Jourdan, 2010; Van Belle et al 2010).

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The previous sections have to some extent been tracking how my approach to addressing the original practice-based research objective have shifted and evolved as the research progressed. Before setting out the aims and objectives of the research I think that it is appropriate to reflect on this journey a little more and consider how it has shaped the final purpose of the research.

As outlined in section 1.1 I began with a clear practice need to understand the impact of a set of educational interventions on a key performance target for my Faculty. Based on my academic discipline being Economics I started from the basis that a comparative statistical analysis of Faculty data would yield the results I was looking for. This view was further strengthened by the fact that previous research consistently highlighted a set of variables which could be used as a causal model on which to base the statistical analysis. As discussed though I quickly encountered a common problem with this type of research relating to the accessibility and reliability of the data required. However more fundamentally I came to realise that

undertaking a traditional statistical analysis might lead to answers in relation to the impact of the intervention but would have only limited value as a means of enhancing practice.

Reflecting back I can see that the underlying reason for the perceived inadequacy of the statistical approach lies in my misinterpretation of my role as the researcher. I failed to recognise that I was undertaking the research as a manager looking for ways to improve practice, not as an economist trying to build and test a model. The epistemological basis of an economist's statistical analysis is the identification of causal relationships which lead to generalizable predictable outcomes. This was not what I trying to do. As a manager I need to understand not the outcome but the impact of the interventions on the outcome and, more importantly, how to improve the effectiveness of the interventions in achieving the outcome. To achieve this I needed an epistemology which was focused on what was happening inside the 'model' not on defining the model itself.

The critical realist perspective seemed to provide an approach which was more suited to my practitioner needs. In the critical realist perspective the economists 'model' becomes a pre-existing social structure which frames the actions of the individual agents. However the crucial difference is that the focus is on the actions and decisions of the agents as they encounter the 'social facts' of the social system. This leads to an epistemology based on individuals' interpretation of, and interaction with, the social system not one based on just observing outcomes (although, as discussed in chapter 4, consideration of outcomes are still part of the evaluative process). From a practitioner point of view by adopting a critical realist perspective for the research I would be able to address the central issue of, not only the impact of the interventions, but also why they may (or may not) be having an impact and what else may be having an impact. Thus areas for making practice enhancements may emerge from the critical realist approach which would not be identified from a purely outcomes focused approach.

Therefore based on the discussion above my approach towards the evaluation of the educational intervention moved towards a research methodology based on critical realism. The exploration of the literature on the realist evaluation of aspects of health policy came quite late in my research process, however it was influential in

determining the final shape and purpose of the research. The development of the Pawson and Tilley (1997) realist evaluation framework by Health researchers into a practical research method provided a firmer basis for my own realist evaluation. More importantly it demonstrated how the adoption of a critical realist perspective was providing Health practitioners with context specific research evidence which was being used to inform practice enhancements. As my research progressed I came to realise that the adoption of a critical realist perspective was providing new insights into both the concept of employability and also my own approach to management practice. The development of an evaluation method based on critical realism provided me, as it did for the Health researchers, with a means of developing research informed, context specific enhancements in a particular area of educational practice.

The final stage in the evolution of the research was therefore a realisation that the originality of the work lay not particularly in the findings in relation to the effectiveness of the employability enhancements but more in the approach I'd taken to reach those findings. Therefore I finally decided that the aim of the research is to consider a specific programme of change as the context for exploring how a critical realist perspective can be used as a basis for research-informed practice enhancements. The specific area of educational practice which forms the context for the research is graduate employability.

The thesis title reflects the stated aim of the research:

“A critical realist exploration of the comparative impact on successful first generation and non-first generation graduates of a programme of change aimed at enhancing employability “

The specific objectives of the research are:

1. (a) To explore with a sample of first generation and non-first generation graduates the potential impact of the pre-existing social structure on both the effectiveness of the programme of change and the eventual graduate job outcome
- (b) To identify any additional mechanisms that had an impact on their eventual graduate job outcome

2. To identify and formulate the pre-existing social structure that impacts on a student's construction of their employability and provides the context for a realist evaluation
3. To reflect on how the adoption of a critical realist basis to the research may potentially provide a different perspective, and new insights, into a specific area of educational practice
4. In the light of the research findings to reflect on how the adoption of a critical realist perspective might lead to research informed management practice enhancements

The first two objectives focus on establishing critical realism as the context for achieving the research's principle aim. The first objective relates to the identified practice issue that was the original starting point of the research. The issue being the need to assess the impact of a programme of change aimed at enhancing employability. The objective as a whole is concerned with the identification of any potential regularities in the experiences of the graduates which may be indicative of contingent causality. More specifically the objective aims to firstly identify any regularities within the mechanisms making up the programme of change (1a). Secondly the objective accepts that there may be regularities which relate to mechanisms which were not defined as being part of the programme of change (1b). The distinction is made between first generation (FG) and non-first generation (NFG) graduates as one of the motivations behind the Faculty enhancements was to recognise the perceived needs of our high proportion of FG students.

The second objective reflects the context dependent nature of the mechanisms and any regularities found in the data. As discussed in section 1.2 the essential elements of critical realist ontology is the recognition of a pre-existing social structure and the impact this has on the social reality constructed by agents. The second objective is therefore concerned with identifying the social structure of employability, as evident in the existing literature, which is the necessary first step in undertaking my critical realist exploration.

The third and fourth objectives relate to the wider issue of what the adoption of a critical realist perspective added to the research in terms of new insights. Both these objectives involved moving beyond my initial practitioner concerns to explore in

more detail the wider implications from the adoption of a critical realist approach. The third objective is concerned with how, and why, a critical realist approach may offer new perspectives on aspects of educational practice, in this case the concept of 'employability'. The final objective relates back to the fact that the research has a definite purpose in providing evidence-informed practice improvements in relation to the Faculty's employability strategy. However we also need to consider how the critical realist approach adopted may be of more general relevance for education managers in developing effective educational enhancements.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REST OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 will consider in more detail the concept of employability, the phenomenon which is at the centre of my critical realist exploration. The chapter argues that in governmental policy terms, 'employability' is derived from a particular perspective on the purpose of higher education. This policy view is derived from the economist's notion of a knowledge-based economy based on endogenous growth theories and the concept of human capital theory. The chapter presents a critical realist critique of this policy view of employability and the implications for understanding the meaning of 'employability' this offers. Chapter 3 moves onto the consideration of previous research into employability. The main purpose is to identify and formalise the social structure of employability. As in chapter 2 the use of a critical realist approach also results in some new insights into the previous literature. Chapter 4 outlines in detail the critical realist methodology adopted for the research. The chapter also discusses how, in order to address objectives 3 and 4, I moved beyond the Pawson and Tilley (1997) realist evaluation method to consider 'employability' from a broader critical realist perspective.

The final two chapters address research objectives 1, 3 and 4 through a detailed consideration of the research data using the social structure and methodology developed in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Chapter 5 discusses the principle findings of my critical realist exploration of the data both in terms of the realist evaluation of the programme of change and the wider 'employability' perspective. Chapter 6 reflects on the research from the practitioner perspective and considers the possible benefits of adopting a critical realist approach for practising managers.(and

also, indeed, for EdD research) The final chapter also offers a final personal reflection on the research journey I have been through.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORETICAL BASIS TO THE EMPLOYABILITY DEBATE

The last 10 years has seen a burgeoning of research and discussion around the concept of student employability within the Higher Education sector. This ranges from work clarifying and defining what is meant by ‘employability’ (Harvey, 2000 and 2001; Little, 2001; Morley, 2001; Lees, 2002; McQuaid and Lindsey, 2005; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2010; Boden and Nedeva, 2010) to curriculum and pedagogical research on how to enhance employability (Knight, 2001; Yorke, 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006; Alison, Harvey and Nixon, 2002; Harvey, Locke and Morley, 2002; Yorke and Knight, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2007; Knight and Yorke, 2003 and 2004; Dacre Harvey, 2005; Yorke and Harvey, 2005; Pool and Sewell, 2007; Bridgstock, 2009) to empirical research on trying to identify actual factors affecting employability (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Holmes, 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Chevalier and Conlon, 2003; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Smetherham, 2006; Cranmer, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007; Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009). This research activity reflects the increased emphasis put on graduate employability by Governments, encapsulated in the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) annual measure of how successful students are in obtaining defined ‘graduate level’ jobs.

As discussed in chapter 1, the new funding arrangements from 2012 onwards gives added emphasis to the DLHE measure as one of the course-based performance measures available for entrants (and their supporters) when deciding which course to take and which institution to attend. The purpose of this chapter is to explore a number of issues which underpin this growing emphasis on the employment outcomes of graduates by Government (both the current Coalition government and the previous Labour administration) and explore how this has impacted on the employability debate. The first section below offers an explanation of how this emphasis on graduate employment outcomes has its origins in developments in theories around economic growth and human capital. This policy basis is reflected directly in the DLHE measure used to assess the performance of universities. The second section presents a critical realist critique of the economic orthodoxy on which

the policy view has been based. The final section considers to what extent the conceptualisation of ‘employability’ reflects and conflicts with the policy view. The chapter concludes by clarifying a critical realist conceptualisation of ‘employability’ which was used in my research.

2.1 THE THEORETICAL BASIS TO GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT POLICY

In his paper reviewing the development of Higher Education policy in the UK Shattock (2006) highlights the shift from what he calls the ‘inside-out’ basis to policy to one which is now more of an ‘outside-in’ approach. He typifies the ‘inside-out’ approach prevalent prior to the 1980’s in the following terms:

“Ministers were not encouraged to have policies about the university sector but when they chose to say something they did so in Delphic tones and their speeches were interpreted by a process of the UGC [University Grants Committee] ‘reading the tea leaves’... and deciding what action it would commend to universities” (p. 135)

The approach was piecemeal and reflected what Delanty (2001) referred to as the ‘post-enlightenment pact’ between universities and the State on the basis that “... in return for autonomy it [the University] would furnish the state with its cognitive requirements” (Delanty, 2001, p.2).

In the UK context the ‘cognitive requirement’ was seen as being initially that the universities (originally just Oxford and Cambridge) would provide the administrative elite to operate the State (and during the 19th and first half of the 20th century, the Empire). In the latter part of the 19th century, and throughout much of the 20th century, this pact evolved into universities producing graduates with the required credentials to support the development of what Perkins (1990) refers to as the ‘professional society’ such as Doctors, Lawyers, Teachers, Civil Servants and the Clergy. This inside-out pact between the State and Higher Education was encapsulated in the early 20th century in what Boden and Nedeva (2010) refer to as the ‘Haldane principle’ (Boden and Nedeva, 2010, p. 39) after Richard Burdon Haldane who “... stated that government funding of universities should be within institutional arrangements that ensure that it did not exert undue influence on what they did” (Boden and Nedeva, 2010, p. 39). This principle underpinned the approach

of the University Grants Committee (UGC) which was founded in 1919 and essentially remained unchanged until the 1980's (Boden and Nedeve, 2010).

There is however a third element in Delanty's 'post-enlightenment pact' forming what some writers have referred to as a 'triple helix', namely 'industry' (Barnett, 1994; Becher and Trowler, 2001). The relationship between Universities and industry was essentially an indirect one with the Universities providing a graduate with an 'education for life' whereas industry undertook the training for the professional jobs they were required to do for the rest of their lives (Perkins, 1990; Delanty, 2001; Boden and Nedeve, 2010). This is evident in the fact that many of the professional bodies associated with the 'professional society' (for example those relating to Engineering, Accountancy, Law, Medicine, Teaching and Marketing) developed (and continue to exist) independently of the University sector.

However Shattock (2006) argues that this hands-off approach to Higher Education policy shifts from the mid 1980's onwards highlighting the Jarrett report of 1985 (Jarrett, 1985) as the starting point, culminating in the Dearing report of 1997 (NCIHE, 1997). To Shattock the Dearing report sets the seal on the move to an 'outside-in' basis to policy. For Shattock the post 1997 'outside-in' policy is more coherent and centrally driven with a clear rational and aims, both in terms of the role of universities within society, what their contribution should be and the nature of their relationship with 'industry'. As put rather succinctly by Rowland (2006) with reference back to the other key post-war policy document on Higher Education, the 1963 Robbins report (CHE, 1963) "Robbins is aspirational; Dearing is instrumental" (p. 9). The question this begs, of course, is what has caused this shift to a more focused centrally-driven instrumental approach to Higher Education policy which became evident by the turn of the century and has not lessened with a change of Government?

The answer to this lies in the acceptance by all governments since the mid 1980s that the UK has become a knowledge society, one based on knowledge industries supporting a knowledge-based economy (Peters, 2002; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Boden and Nedeve, 2010; Tomlinson, 2010). More particularly, in relation to graduate employment outcomes, is the acceptance that growth in a knowledge-based economy comes from within (endogenous growth) based on the

development of an economy's stock of human resources (Denison, 1962; Becker, 1964; Shultz, 1971; Lucas, 1988 and 1990; Romer, 1994; Barro, 1991 and 2001; Olssen and Peters, 2005). To fully answer the question where the outside-in approach comes from we need to consider briefly, in a non-technical manner, underlying developments in economic growth theory since the 1970s.

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries the assumption was that economic growth came from capital accumulation and was not directly linked to levels of education, capital in this context referring to manufactured or physical capital (Wilson, 1995; Jeremy, 1998; Boyce and Ville, 2002). However the assumption should not be made that the shift away from this view leads us to dismissing previous theories towards economic growth. The shift in view is merely a reflection of the idea that economic development takes place in a series of stages based on the underlying structure and resources available to an economy which is driving growth (North, 1981; Gylfason, 1999; McAleese, 2004). From this perspective the UK economy has moved from a stage where growth depended on manufactured capital accumulation to a later stage where growth is based on knowledge.

At their core all economic growth theories rest on the basic assumption that there is a direct link between changes in an economy's output in terms of goods and services produced (Y) and levels of inputs. Inputs are categorised into what economists traditionally refer to as the 'factors of production' but for the purposes of clarity will be referred to here as resources (Cashian, 2007). The categories of resources being natural ('land'), human ('labour') and manufactured ('capital').

The basic model as outlined is:

$$Y = f(K, L, N, t)$$

Where t = time; K = manufactured resources; L = human resources; N = natural resources.

The neo-classical growth model which dominated growth theory for much of the 19th and 20th centuries assumed that growth was achieved through capital accumulation and/or increased access to natural resources (Solow, 1970 and 1994; North, 1981; Gylfason, 1999; McAleese, 2004; Burda and Wyplosz, 2009). Capital accumulation, or 'capital investment', is the process of building up the productive capacity of your

manufactured resources which, when combined with natural resources and human resources, allowed for the production of ever increasing levels of output from the same level of human resources. This process provided the basis for mass production which, with the support of appropriate management structures and the development of mass marketing, further supported economic growth through economies of scale. Chandler (1990) refers to this growth as arising from the process of undertaking a 'three-pronged investment' in manufacturing, management and marketing. This was the means by which the industrialised economies achieved their sustained levels of growth throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Combined with this there was also a need for increasing access to raw material resources to support both capital accumulation and the increasing levels of goods and services resulting from sustained economic growth (Chandler, 1990; Wilson, 1995; Jeremy, 1998; Boyce and Ville, 2002).

In these neo-classical growth models human resources were required in two capacities. Firstly as a direct input into the production process to complete the transformation of manufactured and natural resources into consumable output. Secondly as providing the necessary surrounding support to the manufacturing process through the 'professional society' of managers, engineering, marketers, lawyers, accountants, civil servants and teachers. Actual growth, the production of more output for the same level of input, was seen to come from improvements in manufactured capital resources or better access to natural resources.

However work undertaken by Becker (1964) and Denison (1962) lead to the identification of what Denison referred to as a 'residual factor' in economic growth which could not be accounted for by changes in either manufactured or natural resources. Becker's work suggested that this 'residual factor' was down to human resources. Becker suggested that the human resources in the economy's production function were also actually a source of economic growth and not merely supporting growth emanating from manufactured capital accumulation. This realisation provided the basis for what developed in the 1980's and 90's into 'new growth theory' or 'endogenous growth theory' (Romer, 1994; Lucas, 1988 and 1990; Barro, 1991 and 2001). In new growth theory the production function for an economy can be rewritten as:

$$Y = f(k, A)$$

Where k = the stock of resources; A = productivity.

In this conceptualisation all resources (including human) are regarded as potential sources of growth, however, as in the neo-classical model, economic growth cannot be sustained without improvements in productivity. Unlike in neo-classical growth theory though, human resources are also a direct source of productivity gains not just indirectly through their being combined with other types of resources. New growth theory is based on the assumption that economic growth is driven by technical change, which comes from "... improvements in knowledge about how we transform inputs into outputs in the production process" (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p. 332). In other words the key aspect to growth is the dominance of 'knowledge' which resides in the people who make up the economy's human resources. Growth is thus seen as being *endogenous* i.e. it comes from within the economy and is not dependent on exogenous factors. From this perspective the people element of economic growth moves away from being merely a stock of resources and becomes a source of investment. Hence endogenous growth theories refer to 'human capital' (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1971) rather than 'human resources'.

The widespread acceptance by governments of a knowledge-based economy relying on endogenous growth is commented on not only by academic writers (Peters, 2002; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Boden and Neveda, 2010; Tomlinson, 2010) but is also evident in many policy documents published in the last 10 years (DFES, 2003; Leitch, 2006; DIUS, 2007; Brown, 2010; BIS 2011a). This acceptance also highlights one of the main reasons behind policy towards Higher Education becoming a more 'outside-in' approach (Shattock, 2006) since the mid 1980s. From the perspective where the development of human capital is seen as the key source of future economic growth in a knowledge-based economy then education policy in general, and the Higher Education sector in particular, becomes central to any government's economic policy. In a knowledge-based economy the role of the Higher Education sector fundamentally shifts. Instead of supplying the support to a capital accumulation driven economy in the form of civil servants, doctors, lawyers, teachers and managers, (Perkin's 'professional society') the Higher Education sector becomes key to future economic growth. Not only does the sector produce the

highest potential investment return on human capital and is the source of the highest spending consumers, but it is also a key source of new knowledge on which economic growth depends.

The predominance of a view that economic growth is based on human capital also has another powerful support in that it fits neatly with the over-arching neoliberalism which has been so dominant in Western economies during the last 30 years. This is an ideology based on protecting and promoting the self interest of individuals and the desirability of markets as a “... more efficient mechanism and a morally superior mechanism” (Olssen and Peters, 2005) for the allocation of resources. Further “... neoliberal regimes are legitimised as moral and democratic because choice allows individuals, via their exercise of agency, to determine their own lives and identities” (Boden and Nedeva, 2010). The original conceptualisation of human capital (Becker, 1964; Shultz, 1971) emphasised the essentially personal nature of human capital. Shultz’s original definition clearly links human capital to an individual’s investment in their own education:

“...it [education] is predominately an investment activity undertaken for the purpose of acquiring capabilities that render future satisfactions or that enhance future earnings of the person as a productive agent...since education becomes a part of the person receiving it I shall refer to it as *human capital*” (Shultz, 1971, p.78)

Underlying this definition is the assumption of a market system which links productivity to earnings and also provides the means for your ‘future satisfactions’ to be met.

The discussion above on the reasons behind the more centrally-driven and instrumental approach to Higher Education policy is reflected in the approach to graduate employment taken by Government. From the perspective of a knowledge-based economy, driven by endogenous growth, a key indicator of future growth will be how effective Higher Education is in supplying graduates at the correct knowledge level to satisfy employers. As discussed in chapter 1 the DLHE performance measure reflects this view being based purely on the proportion of graduates who have progressed to graduate level jobs on the census date. Interestingly this performance measure is also relying on the graduate labour market

operating efficiently in matching employer needs with student capabilities, thus also reflecting the neoliberal view on the power of markets discussed previously.

2.2 THE THEORETICAL BASIS TO GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT POLICY: A CRITICAL REALIST CRITIQUE

The previous section has shown how successive governments' views of the purpose and nature of Higher Education has been heavily influenced by theories of economic growth drawn from Macroeconomics. Examination of the key policy documents and government sponsored reports relating to Higher Education reveal a policy discourse which is also predominantly based on Economics. The documents are peppered with terminology and concepts drawn from Economics such as 'customers' (Leitch, 2006), 'demand and supply-led' (Leitch, 2006), 'market failures' (DIUS, 2007), 'innovation and economic transformation' (Browne, 2010), 'competitive disadvantage' (Browne, 2010), 'market-based approach' (BIS, 2011a) plus many more.

At the core of this view lies the theoretical models of endogenous growth developed in the 1980s and 1990s (Romer, 1994; Lucas, 1988 and 1990; Barro, 1991 and 2001) linking economic growth to human capital growth. However the "... educating our way to growth" (Wolf, 2004) assumption is questioned by other economists. One of the main criticisms made is that whilst there is indeed empirical evidence to support the link between economic growth and education (summarised by Bassanini and Scarpetta, 2001), there is less support for a direct link between growth and *changes* in education (Keep and Mayhew, 2004). The direction of causality between Higher Education participation and economic growth is also queried by Wolf. She points out that whilst Switzerland and Hong Kong are two of the most successful post war economies both achieved their economic success with relatively low Higher Education participation rates and a non-interventionist Higher Education policy. Growth in Higher Education participation in these two countries has come *after* economic growth not before (Wolfe, 2004).

The other common objection from amongst economists relates to the robustness of the models used in the econometric work on endogenous growth, particularly possible causal factors which are missing from the models. Both Foray (2006) and Warhurst (2000) for example point out that tacit knowledge can be a key factor in

knowledge creation but is not included in models of growth. Both also point out that econometric models built at the aggregate national level will not pay sufficient regard to differences in social institutions such as Trade Unions or family structures (Warhurst, 2000) and the differing capabilities and competencies of individual firms (Foray, 2006). Another strand of criticism from within Economics questions the inconsistency of approaches taken in specifying models and the range of results achieved with the potential for multiple equilibrium outcomes (Pack, 1994; Langlois, 2000; Fine, 2001).

From a critical realist perspective the objections from within the Economics discipline are highly instructive and can be readily explained. Essentially the explanation revolves around a fundamental difference between how critical realists and economists, with their positivist approach, view causality. As was discussed briefly in chapter 1 there are a number of similarities between the positivist and critical realist approaches to research: both assume an underlying model to be tested; both assume there is an end outcome which is determined by causal relationships between elements in the model. However the key difference between positivists and critical realists relates to what they perceive the nature of the underlying social structure to be and the resulting hypothesised causal relationships.

The assumption made by positivists, including those macroeconomists who developed endogenous growth models (Romer, 1994; Lucas, 1988 and 1990; Barro, 1991 and 2001), is that the underlying theoretical structure contains all the variables which can affect the outcome. In other words the system is closed and, by implication, static. The result of this is the further assumption that causality within the model is based on the premise of constant conjunctions, defined by Bhaskar as "... laws of nature [that] operate independently of the closure or otherwise of the systems in which they occur" (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xiii). Therefore in positivist causality, with constant conjunctions, once a relationship has been found that Y is caused by X then the assumption is that Y will always follow action X. On this basis positivists models are presented as generic models which can be used to predict future outcomes based on the $X \rightarrow Y$ relationship.

However the critical realist view is that when dealing with social systems it is impossible to achieve such closure due to the complexity of the real world (Outhwaite, 1987; Bhaskar, 1998; Lawson, 1998; Kemp and Holmwood, 2003; Scott, 2007) and the fact that the system will be a dynamic system. The first source of complexity is environmental complexity due to the multitude of actual and potential variables which can impact on any particular relationship between X and Y, not all of which can be observed. This essentially is the point being made by both Foray (2006) and Warhurst (2000) when they identified (unobservable) tacit knowledge as a key variable missing from endogenous growth models. In a less specific manner the economists who pointed to inconsistency between how models are specifications are making the same point.

However there is another source of complexity for a critical realist which in orthodox economics is simply assumed away, namely the actions of agents within the social structure. Another facet to achieving closure of a system is to not only assume that all variables are endogenous to the system but also to assume that agents react in a consistent and predictable manner. In effect there is an ontological perspective imposed on agents which fixes the nature of the social world (Lewis, 2009). Thus in orthodox economics there is an assumption that an agent will always act in a rational manner to maximise the outcome for their own benefit. In endogenous growth models, for example, firms will maximise profits, governments will maximise GDP and individuals will maximise personal utility. However in imposing this assumed behaviour you are actually taking away choice from the individual agents (Mearman, 2006) as they become "... passive atoms who inhabit isolated or self contained worlds" (Lewis, 2009, p.109). In models of this type the agent is denied the ability to create their social reality as it is pre-determined by the closure condition of rational behaviour.

Critical realists reject this positivist view and place ontological concerns at the centre of their research approach. As was discussed in chapter 1 critical realists share the positivists' view that there are social 'structures, practices and conventions' (Bhaskar, 1998) which have an existence independent of individual agents. However these are seen as being the result of past actions and can both frame and transform current actions. Therefore social systems are seen as being dynamic, constantly

developing and thus having ‘emergent properties’ (Lawson, 1998) denied to closed social systems. Central to these ‘emergent properties’ are how agents interpret and respond to the pre-existing social structures. Thus for a critical realist, causality relates to how individual agents interpret and respond to elements within the social structure rather than fixing causal relationships based on an imposed ontology of rational behaviour. A critical realist approach to looking at, for example, the issue of the (assumed) growth in the knowledge economy could involve understanding how individual firms were interpreting and responding to technical change. From this may emerge causal factors relating to the possible growing importance of employees as the source of growth rather than just facilitating growth as endogenous growth theory suggests.

Therefore in critical realism causality at a superficial level is based on the observed actions of individual agents within the system. However for critical realists there are levels of causality which operate at different ontological depths or domains (Outhwaite, 1987; Bhaskar, 1998; Fleetwood, 2005; Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011). The ‘actual’ domain exists in time and place and is where the event of X causing Y takes place whereas the ‘empirical’ domain refers to the observed outcome of X causing Y. Within positivist research the assumption of a completely closed system allows for the confirmation and quantification of a universal $X \rightarrow Y$ relationship. However for a critical realist dealing with open systems any causal relationships found on the empirical level would only be applicable within the context that the research was taking place.

There are several reasons behind the critical realist empirical domain assumption, of why causality will only be context-specific. Mearman (2006) rightly points out that whether a system is opened or closed is not a dichotomous ‘either/or’ situation. The extent to which a system can be ‘closed’ will lie somewhere on a spectrum between complete closure and a chaotic completely open system (Mearman, 2006, p.65). Mearman identifies two aspects to closure. Most research will take place in a particular time and place which in itself imposes an automatic local closure. Secondly researchers can impose some partial closure into the system through, for example, limiting the scope of the research (but not by imposing an ontological perspective). Any causality found in one local context may be reflecting factors

specific to that local context, even if the same imposed partial closure was used for a repeat of a piece of research.

Another factor in making individual pieces of critical realist research context specific relates to the relativist approach taken to data collection. As Al-Moudi and Willmott (2011) point out “... there is no unmediated access to reality” (p. 34) a fact which relates to not only the objects of research but also to the researcher(s). The interpretation and actions taken by agents will be unique to that agent reflecting their “... capacities and dispositions ... which collectively comprises that agent’s embodied personality” (Lewis, 2009, p. 111). However the interpretation of the research data will also reflect the ‘conceptual resources’ (Fleetwood, 2004) of the researcher.

Therefore when examining individual social structures in the empirical domain critical realists are looking for what are referred to as ‘regularities’ (Outhwaite, 1987; Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Bhaskar, 1998; Lawson, 1998; Kemp and Holmwood, 2003; Scott, 2007) within the component parts of the social structure. Lawson prefers to use the term ‘demi-regs’ to emphasise that the relationship may not always hold “...demi-regs do involve a conjunction between events (one kind of event following another) but this is not the universal conjunction of positivist laws” (Lawson, 1998, p. 177). Demi-regs may be found to exist within a particular social system but they are only indicative of patterns of behaviour within that particular context. However if we accept that social systems can exhibit different degrees of closure then we would expect that the systems towards the ‘closed’ end of the spectrum would exhibit stronger demi-regs than those towards the ‘open’ end of the spectrum. For the reasons outlined previously though, there is no assumption made that the behaviour will be repeated in another context or, indeed, the data interpreted in the same way by different researchers.

From the above discussion the growth models which underpin the explicit assumptions as to the purpose of Higher Education can be criticised on a number of further counts. Whilst critical realists accept the existence of the ‘social facts’ on which the growth models are built, unlike positivists they do not see these as having any meaningful existence outside of the context of the particular social system defined by the model (Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011). Similarly any relationships found between elements within the social structure will be context specific. For

critical realist researchers what is important is uncovering the underlying demi-regs resulting from the actions of agents within the social system (Lewis, 2009). Or, put another way, finding the elements of the social system (commonly referred to as ‘mechanisms’) which have a behavioural impact in terms of assisting agents achieving the observed outcome. However any mechanism found which triggers the outcome will only be indicative of causality within that particular context. Therefore from a critical realist perspective the criticisms made by some economists in relation to growth models yielding inconsistent results (Pack, 1994; Fine, 2000; Langlois, 2001) are entirely to be expected. Each of the econometric studies testing endogenous growth theory is related to a specific context therefore you would actually expect the results to be different.

For critical realists context dependency also extends to causality. Demi-regs which a researcher may uncover within a social system are indicative of a causal mechanism existing. However this causal relationship will only be contingent causality not constant causality of positivist methodology (Bhaskar, 1998; Outhwaite, 1987). Causality is contingent in two aspects. Firstly due to the open nature of a social system, X causing Y is contingent on other factors within the social structure not intervening and preventing X from causing Y. Therefore a mechanism found within a social system only has the *potential* to trigger the causal effect. Scott (2005) considers that critical realists “... would posit the existence of objects in society, which have this potentiality – that is they have the powers or attributes that may not be actualised but are potentially realisable “(p. 641). Secondly causality is contingent on the context. Therefore, again referring to the non-robustness criticism made of the endogenous growth models by economists, critical realists would not expect causality found in one context to necessarily occur in another context. Similarly the issue of multiple equilibria within models may actually be indicative of contingent causality where you would expect different outcomes arising from the same social system.

However, for critical realists there is another domain beyond the ‘actual’ and ‘empirical’ where causality may indeed become context-free. Critical realists refer to this as the ‘real’ domain (Bhaskar, 1998; Kempster and Parry, 2011) or, as called by Fleetwood, the ‘deep’ domain (Fleetwood, 2004). For critical realists it is this ‘deep’

domain which drives generic relationships within social structures, “the ways of acting of things” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.14). Therefore although demi-regs may be uncovered within a particular context in the empirical domain these demi-regs may be indicative of what critical realist writers (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Bhaskar, 1998; Lawson, 1998; Scott, 2005 and 2007) refer to as ‘generative mechanisms’. A generative mechanism is the means by which the causal relationship between X and Y may be actualised within the ‘deep’ domain. As such generative mechanisms are context-free; they exist within a social system irrespective of a specific context. This is not to say though that if $X \rightarrow Y$ is found to be a generative mechanism in the ‘deep’ domain that $X \rightarrow Y$ will always be found in the empirical domain. As with demi-regs, generative mechanisms are based on contingent causality not constant causality.

As econometric models the models of endogenous growth are open to the general critical realist criticism of conflating the empirical and deep domains (Lawson, 1998; Mearman, 2006). The criticism is that in an econometric model causal relationships found in one context are assumed to apply to all contexts. In critical realist terms there is confusion between context specific demi-regs and context-free generative mechanisms. For critical realists if a demi-reg is to be regarded as a generative mechanism (Pawson and Tilley, 1997 and 2006) it has to be observed to have causal effects across a range of possible contexts. Therefore what is much more persuasive in the research into endogenous growth theory is the work undertaken by Bassanini and Scarpetta (2001). Reviewing econometric data from across 25 OECD countries for the period 1971-98 Bassanini and Scarpetta conclude “... our results point to a positive and significant impact of human capital accumulation to output per capital growth” (p.2). The fact that this causal relationship was found across a significant number of contexts may be suggestive of a deep domain generative mechanism at work rather than an empirical domain demi-reg. However even so this tentative conclusion could only be said to relate to OECD countries and for the period covered by the studies.

Therefore from the critical realist stance adopted for my research the economics underlying the assumptions behind governments’ approach to Higher Education can be criticised for adopting a wholly positivist stance. The common assumptions of closed social systems, an imposed ontology, context-free concepts, and the conflation of the empirical and deep domains make the results of endogenous growth

theory suspect. However this knowledge-based view of the economy is the underlying context within which the debate and research around employability has been conducted and, as discussed previously, is reflected in the performance measure used to assess universities.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF 'EMPLOYABILITY'

Despite the critical realist critique of the underlying theoretical methods behind endogenous growth theory this accepted view of economic development, and the underpinning concept of human capital, may lead us some way towards understanding the observation of Delanty (2006) concerning the instrumental nature of Higher Education policy post-Dearing. From the endogenous growth perspective Higher Education should be regarded, both by the Government and by the student, as an investment in human capital. The term 'investment' implies delaying current consumption in preference to building up current assets (developing capital) to delivery increased consumption in the future. This will take the form of higher economic growth for the Government and higher levels of income for the student. Smetherham (2006) offers a more specific definition of human capital than the early Schultz (1971) definition discussed in section 2.1; "... an individual's collection of qualifications, skills and certified knowledge achieved through formal education and training" (Smetherham, 2006, p 31).

The underlying assumption behind the whole policy approach to employability, including the 2011 white paper (BIS, 2011a), is that the onus is on the individual to invest in acquiring 'qualifications, skills and certified knowledge'. This credentialed knowledge is what a graduate offers to the graduate labour market and it acts as a signal to potential employers and forms the basis of the labour market exchange. The implicit assumption being that the better your credentials, the more employable you are and hence the higher your value in the labour market. In other words the graduate labour market is presented as a supply-driven meritocratic mechanism based on an individual's accumulated human capital. This view of employability is referred to by Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003) as 'absolute' employability. Interestingly Brown, Hesketh and Williams also refer to this view of employability as the

‘consensus’ view emphasising that this is the view held widely not just by policy makers but also across the Higher Education sector.

To emphasise this last point consider the following three definitions of employability, the first from the main employers’ body, the second from an influential Government report and the third from one of the leading academic writers in the area (which also forms the basis for my own institution’s accepted definition of employability):

1. “Employability is the possession by an individual of qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work” (CBI, 1999, p1)
2. “The capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and market environment) within which they seek work” (Hillage and Pollard, 1998, p.12)
3. “A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2004)

Whilst these definitions may vary in emphasis they all have the common elements that employability is largely individually-based and supply-led. This received view of employability clearly reflects the human capital and neoliberal perspective and “...can be seen as quintessentially neoliberal in its emphasis on the individual project of self” (Boden and Nedeva, 2010, p.42).

Looked at from a critical realist perspective the definitions above offer no conceptual basis for the term ‘employability’ to use for my research. The ‘definitions’ are little more than de-contextualised statements relating to the possible end result of an unspecified process. What is important is how an individual gets to the end point of

‘employability’ implied by the definitions. However two features of interest in the definitions stand out. Firstly, only definition 3 links employability directly to employment and even in this case it is qualified as only being ‘more likely’. All three definitions imply that ‘employability’ goes beyond entry into a graduate job with definitions 1 and 2 referring to realising ‘potential’ in the workplace. However achieving this is still dependent on the individual. Secondly, they all recognise a personalised element to employability referring to “individual qualities and competencies”, “attitudes they possess” and “personal attributes”. From a critical realist perspective what is important to understand is both the context within which these are developed and the potential causal impact they may have on making a successful transition into graduate employment.

Therefore these consensus-leaning definitions are very limited in their conceptualisation of employability. However they do recognise there are elements to employability which relate to an individual student’s own personal attributes that may have impact beyond their ‘qualifications, skills and certified knowledge’ (Smetherham, 2006). Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003; also Brown and Hesketh, 2004) also largely dismiss the notion of a one-dimensional meritocratic graduate labour market, based purely on notions of human capital. What they propose is a graduate labour market which is based more on positional competition amongst graduates reflecting the much wider range of factors, including personal attributes, hinted at in the definitions. This alternative to the consensus view of employability they term the ‘conflict view’. This perspective on employability rejects the consensus view as masking deeper social issues which can also be a significant influence on the operation of the graduate labour market. From the conflict perspective the graduate labour market is more fragmented, social-context based, partly determined by demand, and is not purely an exchange process based on merit.

The underlying theoretical basis to the alternative “conflict view” revolves around the Bourdieusian notion that ‘capital’ has a much wider applicability than the human capital construct originally developed by Becker. For Bourdieu, Becker’s human capital reflects an “economism” (Bourdieu, 1986) view of capital which reduces “... the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange” (p. 46). For Bourdieu this focus on what he refers to as ‘economic capital’, defined as capital “... which is immediately and directly convertible into money” (p. 47), is a major weakness of the

human capital view developed by economists from the work of Becker, Schultz and Denison. Bourdieu argues that economic capital is only “... a particular case of exchange” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.46) and argues that there are other types of non-monetary based capital which can be of equal importance.

Thus in the graduate labour market the less transparent forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital, may be just as important to making a successful transition into graduate employment as having the necessary credentials. In Bourdieu’s view cultural capital is developed over time through an individual’s family, class and broader social context and is reflected in an individual’s *habitus* or “... ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being ... and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (Maton, 2008, p. 52). In summary Bourdieu criticises human capital approaches

“... because they neglect to relate scholastic investment strategies to the whole set of education strategies and ... let slip the best hidden and socially most determinant education investment, namely the domestic transmission of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.48)

For Bourdieu a degree is merely a form of institutionalised cultural capital a “... certificate of cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 1986, p 50). Social capital is another form of capital which may be of importance in the graduate labour market, defined by Bourdieu in the following terms

“Social capital is the aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition ... which provides each of its members with the backing and collectively owned capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.51)

Bourdieu makes the assertion that the volume of social capital possessed by an individual is linked to the levels of economic and cultural capital possessed.

The ‘conflict’ view of employability recognises that “... resources and power are both salient resources which can be deployed within the labour market” (Smetherham, 2006). The ‘resources and power’ can be related directly to a graduate’s personal capital which includes their cultural and social capital. From this

conflict perspective the nature of the exchange across the graduate labour market becomes more nuanced based on a range of influences relating not just to credentialed knowledge but also the less obvious aspects of an individual's cultural and social capital. Success in the graduate labour market becomes only partially dependent on achieving a good degree, the nature of a graduate's cultural and social capital may also play a significant part.

From a critical realist perspective the conflict view of employability, with its Bourdieusian underpinnings, does offer the beginnings of a critical realist conceptualisation of employability. There are pre-existing 'social facts' such as schools, degrees, universities, families and networks. Bourdieu also provides a broad underlying theory revolving around the concepts of social and cultural capital and thus supplies the necessary critical element in terms of a contestable theory. Bourdieu's concept of habitus reflects a relativist position in the manner in which an individual's construction of reality is heavily influenced by their social and biographical background. However Maton (2008) presents a view of habitus which clearly places the concept in a more critical realist context "It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is an ongoing and active process... but not under conditions entirely of our own making" (p. 52). The reference to active decision-making based partly on past experiences and partly a response to pre-existing conditions clearly echoes a critical realist ontology.

However there are aspects to the conflict view and its Bourdieusian underpinning which are open to criticism. As was discussed in section 2.2 for a critical realist the notion of 'context' can have a meaning beyond the confines of the social system being researched. 'Context' can also include both the researchers own "stock of conceptual resources" (Fleetwood, 2005) and the actual point in time a researcher is working (Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011). Therefore Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital and their impact may be context-specific to a sociologist writing in France during the 1960's and 1970's. In critical realist terms we may be conflating the empirical and deep domains. By highlighting factors in the context Bourdieu was writing in we're actually interpreting context-specific demi-regs as being context-free generative mechanisms.

The conflict view of employability, based on the Bourdieusian notions of social and cultural capital, moves the conceptualisation of employability away from the purely ‘accumulation of credentials’ notion of the consensus view. By offering some basis for the development of the personal attributes, which the definitions of employability all referred to, it individualises employability. However we need to take this one step further by recognising that the conceptualisation of employability needs to not only relate to an individual’s social and biographical background but also the much wider context within which the student is creating their social world. Tomlinson, writing from an overtly critical realist stance, suggests that

“Employability may be seen as a social process as much as a labour market ‘outcome’ and this process inevitably entails the active positioning of graduates within the wider labour market context within which they are located ... these identities are mediated not only by the labour market context, but also by wider aspects of graduates’ social and cultural experience that frame their self-perception as graduates, and how they approach both their employability and the world of work more generally” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 80-81) “

This critical realist perspective of employability, as in the Bourdieusian conflict view, recognises the importance of an individual’s socio-economic background. The major difference in Tomlinson’s critical realist perspective though is the individual becomes an active agent in a more forward looking and instrumental sense. For Tomlinson a key aspect of the student’s interaction with the social structure is concerned with creating a graduate identity which may entail ‘positioning’ themselves for graduate labour market entry. Therefore in Tomlinson’s critical realist conceptualisation of employability the focus is on how individuals actively affect the employment outcome through their actions and decisions, albeit that these are constrained by the context within which an individual is located.

However whilst accepting the Tomlinson ‘social process’ view of the development of employability we also need to recognise a key difference in my research context. My research is concerned with *former* students who have made the successful transition into graduate employment not *current* final year students who are ‘positioning’ themselves in preparation for entry. For graduates already in graduate

employment, employability reflects more of a concern with how well ‘positioned’ they are to sustain and develop their graduate career. This critical realist view of employability is the one which was used as the basis for my research.

The view of employability developed in the previous paragraph actually takes us full circle back to the original three definitions of employability considered at the start of the current section (CBI, 1999; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Yorke, 2004). As noted all three definitions individualise employability with, for example, the reference to “personal attributes” in the Yorke (2004) definition. However they all also imply that employability goes beyond merely obtaining a job: “... to meet the changing needs of employers” (CBI, 1999); “... sustainable employment” (Hillage and Pollard, 1998); “be successful in their chosen careers” (Yorke, 2004). Therefore the critical realist perspective on employability, developed from Tomlinson, actually provides the missing underlying theoretical basis for our original three definitions.

2.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has explored how the shift in Higher Education policy evident in the last 20-25 years can be seen as reflecting an underlying acceptance of the move to a knowledge-based economy. In a knowledge-based view of the economy, growth is linked directly to investing in, and developing, your human resources. This is a view given theoretical substance by the development of endogenous growth theories by macroeconomists. The chapter has argued how acceptance of this view places Higher Education at the centre of economic growth as the source of both the most developed human capital and the generation of new knowledge. Looked at from a critical realist perspective the chapter has been concerned with developing a view of the central phenomenon of research interest, employability. In developing our understanding of the concept of employability, as used for my research, I have drawn upon discourses largely taken from Economics and Sociology. This is not to say that this is the only view of employability but it is the view which for the context of the research, including my own “stock of intellectual resources” (Fleetwood, 2005), is most useful.

As was discussed in section 2.3 this view of the importance of developing human capital feeds directly into the consensus view of employability. In this human capital view employability is regarded as being dependent on “...an individual’s collection

of qualifications, skills and certified knowledge” (Smetherham, 2006). This consensus view of employability is driven straight through to the DLHE performance measure used by HEFCE to, in effect; assess an institution’s contribution to the knowledge economy. As was discussed in chapter 1 concerns about this performance measure was also one of the start points for the research as the same measure is used internally as one of my own performance indicators.

However from a critical realist stance, aside from the generic concerns about economic method, particularly econometric method (section 2.2), the consensus view of employability is inadequate as a basis for the conceptualisation of employability. The focus on the single factor of credential accumulation decontextualises employability by denying the impact of the wider social context (Tomlinson, 2010; Boden and Nedeva, 2010). The elements within the wider context not only influence the outcome of the social system for individual agents but also the individual’s social construction of their employability within the social system. The main purpose of chapter 3 is to develop the social structure through which my own graduates have “traversed” (Tomlinson, 2010).

Two other practice consequences of the adoption of a narrow consensus view of employability are also evident. Firstly the consensus based DLHE performance measure leads to not only a decontextualised concept of employability but can also leads to decontextualised institutional policies towards employability. The temptation is to impose generic employability policies to what is, from the critical realist perspective, essentially a uniquely individual issue (Boden and Nedeva, 2010). The second practice issue relates to the interpretation of ‘successful’ as contained within the research question. From the purely practice base of trying to improve the Faculty’s DLHE performance then ‘success’ relates to a student obtaining a graduate level job. However, in adopting a critical realist approach to the research, ‘success’ needs to also be viewed from the perspective of the graduates who participated in the research. Interestingly although the definitions considered in section 2.3 are explicitly consensus-leaning the first two acknowledge the importance of a graduate realising “... his or her aspirations and potential” (CBI, 1999). This last point will be developed further in chapter 3 where an alternative basis for ‘success’ will be developed.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE RELATING TO EMPLOYABILITY

Chapter 2 has set the underlying context for the research in reviewing the drivers behind the policy approach to employability at Governmental level. Chapter 2 also offered a critical realist critique of the economics basis of the policy approach. This critique was extended into the ways in which employability has been commonly defined and conceptualised, resulting in my rejection of these as providing an adequate basis for my research. For my research a critical realist conceptualisation of employability has been adopted where the student is an active participant in the creation of their employability through their interaction with the elements of the employability social structure. The purpose of this chapter is to develop the pre-existing 'real' social structure of employability which students face as they endeavour to make a successful transition into graduate employment.

As was discussed in chapter 1 the method adopted to address the first research objective (section 1.4) was one based on the Pawson and Tilley (1997) approach of realist evaluation (which will be considered in more detail in chapter 4). A necessary starting point for critical realist research of this sort (reflected in research objective 2) is to establish the pre-existing contextual elements which make up an underlying social structure (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Timmins and Miller, 2007; Ogrinc and Batalden, 2009; Miller and Tsang, 2010; Ranmuthugala et al, 2011). However for critical realists the social structure is not deterministic in nature but more a construction of those tangible and intangible pre-existing 'social facts' (Pring, 2004) which impinge on the creation of an individual's social reality. What is equally important is to establish the relationships between the elements of the social structure. Although these social constructs have no independent agency how individual agents construct their social reality reflects both the implicit and explicit relationships between them. Thus, for example, one aspect of an individual student's view of their own employability may be influenced by their perception of the importance of their work experience. If they perceive that there is a strong

relationship between success in the graduate labour market and work experience they may actively seek work experience as part of the development of their own employability.

To undertake my research therefore I needed to identify the social system relating to employability which the research participants experienced, and interacted with, on their way to the final outcome of a graduate level job. In establishing these “structures, practices and conventions” (Bhaskar, 1998) of real world structures relating to employability we are in effect setting up the underpinning contestable ‘theory’ which the research will partially assess.

However there is an inherent problem in such an undertaking. As was discussed in section 2.2 one of the major criticisms of positivist theory by critical realists is the tendency to conflate the empirical and deep domains. For a critical realist trigger mechanisms, and related claims about contingent causality, are context specific and we cannot extrapolate the results to other contexts. Pawson and Tilley offer a way through this problem by suggesting the following:

“... a process in which we move from one specific empirical case to a general theory and back to another case and so on. What are transferable between cases are not lumps of data but sets of ideas. The process works through the development of a body of theory which provides an organising framework which abstracts from a program a set of essential conditions which make sense of one case after another” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 120)

One method to develop an ‘organising framework’ of this type is to undertake a review of previous research and look for commonalities which emerge that are suggestive of generic ‘structures, practices and conventions’ and causal mechanisms. Indeed this is the approach undertaken by a number of researchers in the area of health policy where the use of realist evaluation has been most widespread (see for example Ranmuthugala et al, 2011; Whitelaw et al, 2010; Van Belle et al, 2010; Wand, White and Patching, 2009).

Section 3.1 considers previous research into the factors affecting employability to identify the common elements, and potential mechanisms, on which a social system relating to employability may be built. As part of this process I also discuss aspects of previous research which is relevant to the possible differences between FG and NFG graduates. Section 3.2 moves onto construct a social system based on previous research, in effect creating an ‘organising framework’ within which the realist evaluation will take place. Section 3.3 returns to the issue which was raised at the end of chapter 2 in relation to the different perception research participants may have of ‘successful’ than that implied by the practice-focused research question.

3.1 PRIOR RESEARCH INTO FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

Bhaskar describes the critical realist view of society in the following terms

“People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless they do so”
(Bhaskar, 1998, p.36)

The ‘structures, practices and conventions’ of the social structure refers to both the tangible legal, political and organisational institutions that exist within a society, and also the less tangible ethical, moral and general societal attitude and structures that a society reflects. Pring (2004) refers to these entities as identifiable “social facts” which clearly exist and are not simply socially constructed. During the 1990’s and early 2000’s a number of large scale quantitative studies on employability were undertaken investigating the key influencing factors on success in the graduate labour market (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; HEFCE, 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Smetherham, 2006). In critical realist terms the studies were beginning to explore the ‘social facts’ that defined a social structure behind a student’s employability.

The studies provide confirmation of the intuitively obvious ‘social fact’ that there is a direct link between a student’s degree class and success in the graduate labour market. One of the most comprehensive of the studies to support this outcome was

carried out for HEFCE by Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille (2003). The research was conducted through interviews with 60 academic staff from across 34 departments, 247 graduates and 210 line managers plus the analysis of DLHE data. The research concluded that “... the probability of being employed is found to be significantly positively related to holding a First Class or Upper Second degree ...” (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009, p. 16). Similar research based upon degree outcomes by Smetherham (2006) took a more focused perspective looking into the post-university destinations of graduates with First Class degrees. The research was conducted by means of a postal survey to which she received 846 responses from graduates of 8 institutions, the results were then analysed using standard statistical methods. The outcome of the research leads to a similar conclusion as that reported by Mason et al that “the higher one’s degree, the better one fares” (Smetherham, 2006, p. 37). Raw data collected within my own Faculty for 2007 graduates (appendix 5) shows a similar pattern with 73% of First Class degree holders recording a positive destination dropping to 54% for Upper Seconds and 49% for Lower Seconds.

However Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) and Smetherham (2006) go on to qualify the importance of the degree class to graduate labour market success by pointing out that their studies also show other factors as being statistically significant. Smetherham in particular adopts an overtly Bourdieusian approach suggesting that we need to look beyond purely human capital explanations to account for the variability in employment success. She concludes that there were sufficient variances in her results to lead her to the conclusion that: “The data presented show that while to a large extent those with firsts were at a positional advantage within the labour market, when compared to those with 2.2s, there were also clear differences among those with firsts” (Smetherham, 2006, p. 43).

The work of Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) and Smetherham (2006) is in fact part of a body of research which dates back nearly 20 years to work carried out by Smith, McKnight and Naylor (2000). This strand of research suggests that the consensus view of employability discussed in section 2.3, whilst correct to a certain degree, is actually too narrow a perspective to take. Commenting on this early work by Smith, McKnight and Naylor, Mason et al (2009) comment that

“Smith, McKnight and Naylor (2000) find that the probability of student-leavers being employed six months after graduation is positively related to the class of degree and is strongly influenced by the subject studied, measures of prior educational attainment (such as A-level point scores), age at graduation and social class background” (p.9)

Since this early work subsequent research has not only confirmed the impact of factors identified by Smith, McKnight and Naylor but has also added gender, ethnicity, institution attended and sandwich placements as other key factors impacting on a graduate’s success in the graduate labour market (HEFCE, 2001; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

What we therefore see emerging from this largely quantitative work is tentative signs of a social structure with certain elements reoccurring in different research contexts. In other words an organising framework in the sense used by Pawson and Tilley (1997) is becoming apparent. The list of factors in the last paragraph suggests a number of contextual factors which may be relevant in impacting on employment success. However the reliance on positivist research methods presents some problems on using the research outcomes as a basis for establishing a critical realist social system.

As is common in positivist research the focus on outcome leads to an ignoring of how the relationships within the social structure operate in leading to the outcome. More specifically they neglect how this impacts on individual students as they look to achieve the desired outcome of a graduate level job. In effect there is a conflation of context and mechanism, a common compliant amongst critical realist researchers in relation to non-critical realist research (see for example Timmins and Miller, 2010; Ward, White and Patching, 2010). Thus, for example, a graduate’s social background is one of the factors some of the quantitative research suggests as having a causal impact on employability (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003). However from a critical realist perspective the social background of a graduate is part of the context and not a trigger mechanism. Mechanisms are the “... choices and capacities which lead to regular pattern of

behaviour” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.217). A graduate’s social background is not a matter of choice. Therefore from a critical realist perspective we have to separate out contextual factors from the actual choices made by agents. Looking from a practice point of view it is providing students with the opportunities to take advantage of employment enhancing mechanisms which is important and not just the context. However the context may be of relevance in determining which mechanisms are triggered for which students.

Of the previous large scale studies into employability the work carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) for HEFCE (reported in Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002 and Brennan and Shah, 2003) begins to address some of the weaknesses, from a critical realist perspective, of the purely quantitative work discussed above. The work is also of interest as the main focus of the study is on students from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds.

The data set consisted of 4,340 1995 UK graduates who were contacted by the researchers in 1999. The research focuses on what the research team refer to as ‘intervening variables’ which had a positive employment impact and whether there are any differences in outcomes for graduates from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds. The CHERI researchers defined ‘disadvantage’ as relating to three distinct factors: parents’ status and education, age and ethnicity. The use by the researchers of the term ‘disadvantaged’ is unfortunate with its negative connotations. It also does imply that the results of the research were almost assumed from the outset.

Two major reports were produced from the research. The first report (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002) was a statistical analysis of the factors which were associated with a successful labour market outcome, particularly focusing on those from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds. The second follow up report (Brennan and Shah, 2003) was more concerned with the ways in which higher education institutions might be able to improve the employment prospects of these students. The researchers followed up the original statistical report by visiting four universities and conducting interviews with students and staff. The purpose of the interviews was to look at some institutional initiatives which were aimed at helping students succeed in the labour market.

The first report (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002) is based on the analysis of the relationship between what are defined as ‘independent variables’ and ‘dependent variables’. Independent variables are defined as factors such as socio-economic background, age, ethnicity and education (both university and pre-university). The researchers further split independent variables down into two sub-divisions: direct factors relating to education (university and school attended, degree subject and degree class); and indirect factors relating to the students social and demographic background. Dependent variables are success in the labour market, income, quality of job and job satisfaction. In critical realist terms the independent variables are defining the context of the social structure and the dependent variables the outcome.

The general conclusion of the report is that graduates from socially ‘disadvantaged’ groups do less well in the labour market mainly due to direct factors (p.6). Further on in the report the researchers make a stronger claim in relation to the impact of socio-economic background on graduate labour market outcomes

“When interpreting direct effects of socio-biographical background we are directed towards the factors such as cultural characteristics acquired in the family, lack of appropriate social networks and financial assets as well as various forms of self-exclusion from certain high-status jobs” (p.13)

This conclusion has a clear Bourdieusian frame of reference implicitly referring to the importance of social and culture capital on success in the graduate labour market. However, as noted before, the statement still does not separate the context from mechanisms, although the reference to ‘self-exclusion’ does suggest a (perhaps) unconscious behavioural decision by students. What the statement does imply though is that there are differences in context which lead to potentially differing outcomes for ‘socially disadvantaged’ graduates. In other words the outcome as shown by the dependent variables is context dependent.

As mentioned previously though the CHERI researchers define a third class of variables which they call ‘intervening variables’. The ‘intervening variables’ are defined as being “... a set of additional factors that might intervene in the relationship between social and educational factors and employment. These are important because they represent factors over which higher education institutions have some degree of control” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p.4). From a critical realist perspective

these intervening variables are deliberate interventions in the social structure. They represent choices and opportunities for students which may lead to enhanced employability. In other words they are potential mechanisms.

Table 3.1 is adapted from table 1 in the CHERI report (Blasko, Brennan, Shah and Little, 2002, p.8) and, by the researchers own admission, only tentatively tries to capture the main positive impact factors on employability or, in critical realist terms, potential mechanisms.

Table 3.1 – CHERI factors associated with successful employment outcomes

	All	Lower socio-economic groups
<i>Work experience in HE</i>	+	+
<i>Absence of term-time working</i>	+	+/-
Extra-curricular activities	+	+/-
Overseas experiences in HE	+	-
Early job search	+	+
Techniques of job search	+	-
<i>Private employer</i>	+	-
<i>Medium/ large employer</i>	+	+

+ Access; - limited access; +/- some access

Source: Adapted from Blasko, Brennan, Shah and Little, 2002, p.8

The researchers also tentatively suggest that students from lower socio-economic groups do not have access to some of the potential mechanism for reasons connected with their lower levels of social and cultural capital. In critical realist terms the researchers are suggesting that the effectiveness of the intervening variables is context dependent. Students from lower socio-economic groups come from a different context which reduces the potential range of opportunities (mechanisms) open to them to enhance their job market success. However given the tentative and partially subjective nature of these conclusions it would be rash to suggest that the CHERI researchers have uncovered any demi-regs in their data. It also has to be

queried how many of the intervening variables in the table actually meet their definition of “...factors over which higher education institutions have some degree of control”. Of the potential mechanisms in table 3.1 it is debatable how much influence the Institution has over at least half of the factors listed (those shown in *italics* in the table).

The CHERI report also provides more detail on the specific job search techniques associated with a successful employment outcome (Blasko, Brennan, Shah and Little, 2002, p 7). These are listed below in rank order:

1. Using contacts established during the course of study
2. Contacting employers without knowing about a vacancy
3. Seeking assistance from teaching staff
4. Using the institution’s careers service
5. Using personal contacts
6. Applying for an advertised vacancy
7. Being approached by an employer

This list again shows the outcome of choices made by students and therefore also identifies mechanisms within the employability social structure. However there is no attempt this time to separate out the responses of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Also the same criticism can be made as for the impact factors of how many of these potential mechanisms meet the CHERI definition of being an “intervening variable”?

Further evidence for the relative importance of some of the mechanisms listed above can be found in a report by Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton (2005) entitled “The class of ‘99”. This research looked at the career trajectories of over 9,600 1999 graduates with data being collected via a postal questionnaire with some follow-up interviews. This was repeating earlier research with graduates from 1995 (Elias, McKnight, Pitcher, Purcell, and Simm, 1999). Whilst the focus of the research is not directly on the factors impacting on employability the report does present findings on the relative importance of some of the factors listed above as sources of job information.

Some of the findings now look a bit dated (the most common source was ‘publications’ and there is no mention of the internet). However there is some similarity with the CHERI findings in that the use of the University careers service (75%) and ‘networks’ (65%) show up strongly. However, interestingly, when asked about how useful the information source actually was the figure for the careers service drops to only 40% whilst networks show as 57% (Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005, p.8). As summarised by Purcell at al “Networks were considered the most useful overall” (Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005, p.8) however the report also notes that

“... those from a managerial and professional social class background reported making greater use of networks and careers advisory services than those from lower socio-economic groups” (Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005, p.8)

Brennan and Shah (2003) in the later CHERI report also make a similar point: “Students who are already relatively ‘advantaged’ in employability terms were more likely to take advantage of the various opportunities available in their institutions to enhance their employability” (p. V).

Overall this strand of research suggests that there are context related factors which are influencing the effectiveness of trigger mechanisms within the social structure relating to employability. Although the different researchers use slightly different definitions/ terminology they imply that there are trigger mechanisms which seem to work more effectively for students who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds (associated with previous higher education experience in the family). In this sense the work supports the Bourdieu influenced conflict view of employability as discussed in section 2.3.

As mentioned earlier the second CHERI report (Brennan and Shah, 2003) follows up the original work by visiting four universities and conducting interviews with students and staff to look at some institutional initiatives which were aimed at helping students’ success in the labour market. In critical realist terms the researchers looked at four different contexts, each with their own set of intervening variables (potential mechanisms), and tried to uncover any cross-context demi-regs which might be apparent. The outcome however is inconclusive. Without expressing

any definite opinions on which initiatives seemed to be effective the researchers merely offer the following main observations:

1. There are difficulties in targeting support to disadvantaged students, but the danger of untargeted support simply widens the imbalance already present
2. The recognition of the importance of academics in the employability process
3. The fact that mentoring and volunteering schemes can be an important impact factor (referred to as ‘extra-curricular activities’)
4. The way in which as the labour market becomes “... ever more elaborate, so too do the techniques that institutions devise to help students get around them” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p. v-vi)

A more recent piece of research takes a similar focus in looking at examples of best practice in relation to employability from Higher Education Institutions from outside of the UK (BIS, 2011b). The researchers (a consultancy group called ‘igraduate’) collected data from 414 institutions around the world via an on-line questionnaire, with follow up semi-structured telephone interviews with 25 respondents. Although the research focuses on the perception of the institutions rather than the students the results support the four areas identified by the CHERI report. However in relation to point 3 they suggest that where these extra-curricular activities can be for academic credit the impact is higher.

The igraduate report also adds a couple of other factors to the CHERI list which may improve the effectiveness of employability enhancements

5. Wider engagement of students with alumni and employers
6. Exploring new organisational structures to deliver employability (clarifying the rather vague statement from CHERI report shown as point 4 above)

Of these six points observations 2, 3 and 5 offer further potential mechanisms in influencing a student’s employability.

The work of Moreau and Leathwood (2006) shifts the focuses onto the post-graduation experiences of students from a post-92 university. Moreau and Leathwood undertook a longitudinal study of the experiences of students’ from their initial University induction though to their post-graduation employment experiences. All the students were from the same University but spread across a range of

discipline areas. The post-graduation experiences of these students are reported in their 2006 paper (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). For this part of the research Moreau and Leathwood conducted 32 short telephone interviews followed up by 5 semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. All 32 interviewees had only recently graduated and relatively few (7) had secured a graduate level job. The use of a qualitative approach based on interviews, particularly the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews, allowed Moreau and Leathwood to explore the graduate's own views and perceptions of both the graduate labour market and their own employability.

One interesting outcome from this approach is that the interviewees tended to downplay the importance of any socio-demographic factors. The graduates "... reflected the discourse of employability that in their experiences an increase in skills and qualifications will translate into benefits in the labour market" (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006, p.316). More specifically they state that "... discrimination was thought to be unlikely 'in this day and age' (Maya), with these graduates articulating a discourse of individualisation through which the influence of social structures is downplayed" (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006, p.317). In other words what Moreau and Leathwood found is that their interviewees reflected a strongly consensus view of employability - success in the labour market was down to them, how hard they work and what credentials they have. This is a finding replicated in work by Tomlinson (2007) with final year students "... often overlooking social and economic structures which might shape their opportunities and outcomes" (p. 289). These findings are in direct contrast to the findings from much of the quantitative research discussed earlier. However as commented on in chapter 1 the social reality constructed by the interviewees may well be influenced by the unacknowledged causal factors suggested by the quantitative research (Kempster and Parry, 2011).

One strong commonality among Moreau and Leathwood's interviewees, which is consistent with the quantitative research, is the importance of undertaking a sandwich placement whilst at University. The importance of a sandwich placement as a trigger mechanism is reflected in much of the quantitative research into employability (Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005). Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) in particular claim this is a major finding from

their research, confirming earlier work of “... a strong positive correlation between employment and participation in employment based ‘sandwich’ training placements... the same applies to the relationship between sandwich participation and employment in a graduate-level job” (p.12).

From a critical realist perspective what is important about the work of Moreau and Leathwood (2006), and to some extent the second CHERI report (Brennan and Shah, 2003), is that the researchers move away from an overtly positivist methodology. By conducting interviews with participants within the social structure they are focusing more on the ontological aspects of employability and less on the outcomes. In effect Moreau and Leathwood present a series of case studies of how their interviewees perceived their interaction with graduate labour market.

3.2 THE SOCIAL SYSTEM RELATING TO EMPLOYABILITY

As was discussed at the start of this chapter the necessary pre-requisite for my research was the identification of the “structure, practices and conventions” (Bhaskar, 1998) which defined the pre-existing social structure relating to employability. Table 3.2 summarises the reoccurring factors which researchers have identified as key elements of the social structure. For the purposes of my research these factors formed the basis of my ‘organising framework’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) underpinning my realist evaluation.

As discussed in section 3.1 one of the commonest problems for critical realist researchers in building a social structure based on previous non-critical realist research is the conflation of context and mechanisms within these previous studies. Most of the potential mechanisms discussed in section 3.1, which can be identified from previous research, tend to be tentative suggestions rather than based on reliable research.

Table 3.2 Contextual Elements of the Social Structure

1	Class of degree	Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; HEFCE, 2001; Smetherham, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005
2	Prior educational attainment	Smetherham, 2006; Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005
3	Age	Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003, HEFCE, 2001
4	Social class	Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000
5	Gender	Smetherham, 2006; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005
6	Ethnicity	Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; HEFCE, 2001
7	Parental background (income and HE contact)	Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003
8	Institution attended	Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005
9	Degree	Required by definition

However one mechanism which does emerge across the previous research is that of students having chosen to take a sandwich work placement as part of their degree (Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; , Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005; BIS 2011b). One conclusion of the CHERI research, for example, was

“More than nine months of related work experience was associated with more successful employment outcomes but less than nine months of unrelated work experience was quite strongly associated with less successful outcomes” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p.14)

Indeed given that the importance of a sandwich placement in future job market success is noted in a cross-section of employability-related research we could argue that it has the characteristics of being a generative mechanism. The views of graduate recruiting managers, reported by Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille

(2003), adds further evidence to the potential cross-context importance of a sandwich placement: “Over two-thirds of line managers regarded sandwich placements during university studies or ‘other relevant work experience’ as very or quite important for filling jobs held by graduates” (p. 59).

As was discussed in section 2.2 critical realists make the distinction between different levels of causality. Although all causality is contingent there is a distinction to be made between causal relationships tied to specific contexts (demi-regs) and those which occur across contexts (generative mechanisms). Sandwich placements seem to have a contingent causality which occurs not just in one research context but across all research contexts. In critical realists terms a course-related sandwich placement would appear to operate in the deep domain, rather than just the empirical domain, as a context-free generative mechanism. As described by Bhaskar a generative mechanism is “the ways of acting of things” (Bhaskar, 2008, p.14) which drives generic relationships deep within the social structure.

What is not clear from previous research is a possible explanation of why a sandwich placement seems to operate as a context-free generative mechanism. Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) offer a possible intuitive explanation that “it seems likely that students choosing these courses are strongly motivated by the opportunity to gain early work experience and contacts with employers that will help them gain employment following graduation” (p. 16). However they can find no empirical support for this within the data set used for the research (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009, p.16).

An alternative approach to understanding the importance of sandwich placements is offered by Holmes’ notion of ‘graduate identity’ (Holmes, 2001). Holmes offers a different perspective by providing a theoretical context to the perceived importance placed on work experience by the students (as also noted in Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Holmes comments that work experience provides students “...with the opportunity to engage in the practices of that occupational arena in an explicit and intentional manner” (Holmes, 2001, p.117). For Holmes this is an important aspect in the formation of a student’s ‘graduate identity’ in the sense that “... an individual who has graduated is successful in gaining affirmation of their identity as a graduate

in relation to the social settings for which it is deemed relevant” (Holmes, 2001, p. 115).

Holmes’s application of the concept of ‘situated identities’ with its emphasis on the need for the individual to seek affirmation of their self-identification through ‘significant others’ (such as employers) sits comfortably with the critical realist view of employability. There is a clear focus on the individual student pro-actively engaging with an aspect of the social structure as part of the creation of their graduate identity. We may expect that a student’s situated identity, as affirmed by their work experience, to be a key element of a student’s self-perception as they position themselves for entry into graduate labour market. Further research would be needed however on how important an individual’s sandwich placement is in the development of their graduate identity and the role it may play as a possible generative mechanism.

One element of table 3.2 over which it is difficult to separate out context from mechanism is class of degree. As was discussed in section 3.1 there is consistent evidence from previous research of the direct link between a good degree and improved chances in the graduate labour market. However there may be both contextual and behavioural factors at work in determining a student’s final degree performance. The student’s innate ability and social background are clearly contextual however the student’s commitment to take the opportunities offered for study are more to do with how the student constructs their social reality whilst a student.

The two CHREI reports (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003) present a schematic representation entitled ‘social and educational determinants of labour market success’ incorporating the factors summarised in tables 3.1 and 3.2. Figure 3.1 reproduces the CHERI framework. The purpose of figure 3.1 from the CHERI researchers’ perspective was to provide a holistic summary of the key factors their research indicated were impacting on a student’s success in the graduate labour market. Thus figure 3.1 (see next page) shows that a student’s social and biographical background is not only a direct factor on success in the labour market (link 3) but also an indirect factor through its impact on their

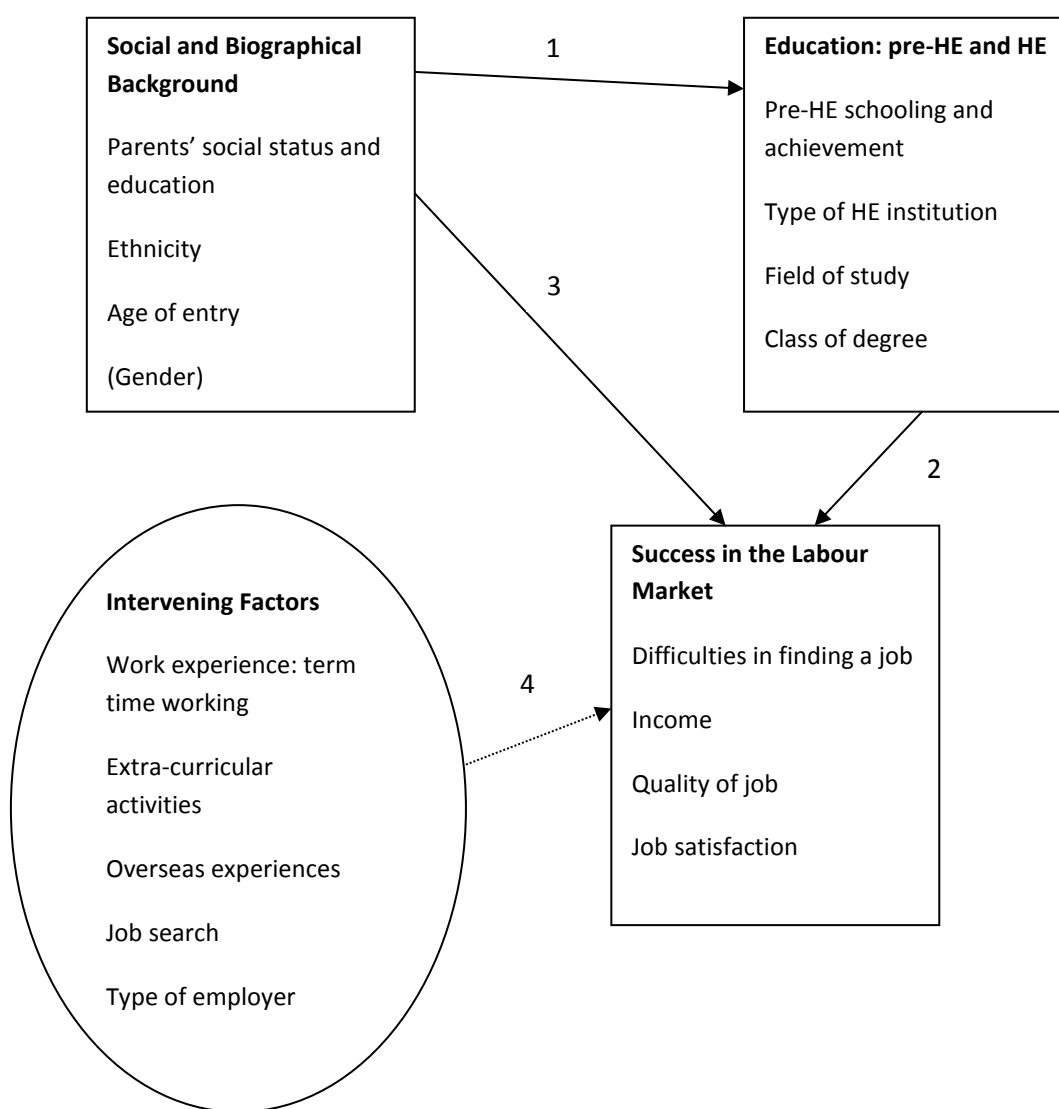
education (link 1+ 2). Link 4 indicates the potential impact of the ‘intervening variables’ on achieving ‘success in the labour market’.

From a critical realist perspective figure 3.1 has the beginnings of a social structure relating to employability. However there are a number of weaknesses as it stands and further development is required before it could be used as a basis for a realist evaluation. From a critical realist perspective the factors listed in the two square boxes as ‘Social and biographical background’ and ‘Education’ are aspects of context with the oval ‘intervening variables’ box being suggestive of potential mechanisms. However conflating pre-university and university education into one box is problematic. Pre-university education and university education are two distinct elements of the social structure with one pre-dating the other. Further there is a direct causal link between the two as performance ‘pre-HE schooling and achievement’ impacts directly on ‘type of HE institution’ and ‘field of study’.

The other major weakness of figure 3.1 is the presentation of the ‘intervening variables’ in isolation from the other elements in the framework. As discussed previously evidence presented in the CHERI reports and Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton (2005) suggests that a student’s social and biographical background can be a factor in how extensively a student engages with CHERI’s ‘intervening factors’. This impact of contextual factors on the potential mechanisms is, for some reason, not shown in figure 3.1.

However despite the identified weaknesses, from a critical realist perspective, figure 3.1 does show a set of basic relationships supported, not only by the CHERI reports, but also by other research as summarised in table 3.2.

Figure 3.1 – The CHERI framework of determinants of success in the labour market



Source: Based on Blasko, Brennan and, Little and Shah (2002)

Therefore previous research into employability provides a set of contextual variables (summarised in table 3.2) and possible causal relationships. When these are combined with the institutions (schools, universities, employing companies) and embedded practices (such as those related to graduate recruitment or university entrance) then a critical realist social structure surrounding employability begins to emerge.

Figure 3.2– The Social Structure of Employability

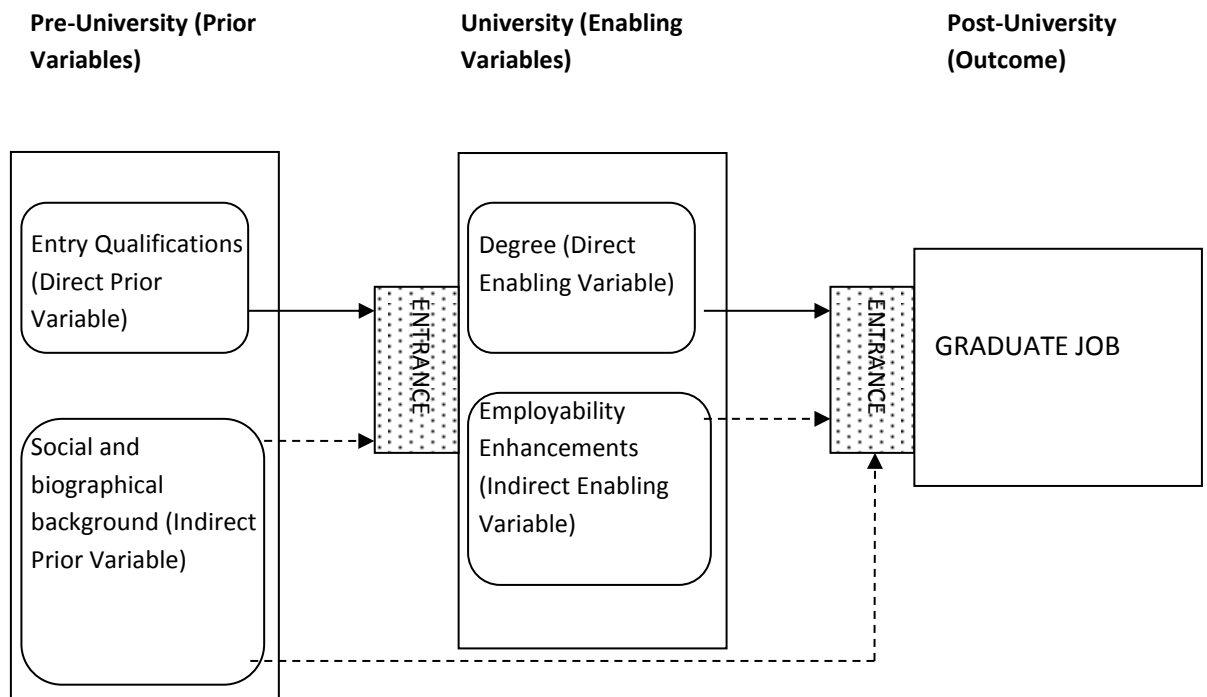


Figure 3.2 combines all these elements to present a generic social structure for employability. Looking at the elements in table 3.2 it can be seen that they fall into two temporal groups – pre-university and university. The social structure also contains two transition points, or ‘entrances’, one into university and one into the graduate labour market. These are less tangible, but equally important, aspects of the social structure. In relation to Bhaskar’s definition of society as “... an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions” (Bhaskar, 1998) the entrances represent the ‘practices and conventions’ which are associated with entry into university and entry into a graduate job.

As the focus of my research relates to aspects of a graduate's time at University the set of factors pre-university are referred to as 'prior variables' (elements 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 from table 3.2). These are contextual factors which, although they might impact on employability, are determined before going to University. Hence they are part of the pre-existing real aspect of the social structure for the purposes on my research. These prior variables are split into two types, direct (element 2) and indirect (elements 3 to 7). Within the context of the social structure the term 'direct variable' is used to indicate pre-requisites which can be regarded as being essential for the graduate to make the transition to the next stage. In other words they provide the means to pass through the two entrances shown in figure 3.2. Within my Faculty there is no pre-selection interview for the courses included in the research therefore the only direct prior variable is the need for the student to obtain the level of UCAS points required for entry to their chosen course. Hence in figure 3.2 the direct prior variable of 'entry qualifications' is shown by an unbroken arrow leading to entrance onto their chosen degree course at university.

In contrast 'indirect variables' are those factors in a student's social and biographical background which previous research (summarised in table 3.2) suggests may have a significant indirect (and possible unacknowledged) impact on both entrance to university and the graduate labour market. As discussed previously, for Bourdieu this is the "... best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.48). Unlike the literature around transition into the graduate labour market there is a growing literature around the transition into university and the potential impact of a student's social and biographical background on how successful this transition may be. Although the main focus of my research is on the graduate labour market transition the widening participation (WP) literature focusing on the university transition is of some relevance (for example Reay, 2004; Reay, Ball and David, 2006; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009 and 2010; Crozier and Reay, 2011).

The WP literature tends to take a relativist qualitative approach focussing on individual accounts and perceptions. Much of the literature of relevance for my research (as referenced above) is firmly based in sociology making explicit use of a Bourdieusian conceptual framework, in particular the concepts of social and cultural capital. The research builds on the premise that an individual's social and

biographical background impacts on an individual's success in reaching and, indeed, succeeding at university. However an added dimension is the notion that there may also be an 'institutional habitus' associated with an individual university which may also be a factor in the choice of which university to attend. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) describe institutional habitus in the following terms: "... a complex amalgam of agency and structure and could be understood to as the impact on of a cultural group or social class or an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation" (p.109). In terms of individual behaviour Reay, Crozier and Clayton suggest that choice of university may be partly influenced by institutional habitus in the sense that "... students tend to choose a university with which they feel comfortable where there are 'people like us' ..." (p. 109). Given the high number of FG students within my Faculty this may clearly be a factor in why students choose my university in the first place.

Generally the WP literature highlights the impact of similar socio-biographical factors on entering university as the employability literature. One other strong theme running through the WP literature, which has a direct link to the qualitative employability literature, is the instrumental approach to university taken by many students (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p. 112). The other common theme between the two is the sense felt by many working class students of being 'different' from middle class students with a higher education family background (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p.117). Brennan and Shah (2003) found similar issues around students from a 'disadvantaged' background struggling with their time at University

"For many students, the experience of higher education was increasingly anonymous ... some students remained 'strangers' in the university community, did not feel that they fully belonged and, we might surmise, did not fully recognise themselves as 'graduates' in quite the same way as their peers" (p. V)

Within the context of my own research these issues relating to how FG students react to and view their University experience may be another intangible aspect of the employability social structure. As discussed previously aspects of context may also be a factor in how students respond to the employability enhancements and how

effective they may be as trigger mechanisms. However one issue with some of the WP literature (and indeed other education research) is the assumption that the ‘working class’/ ‘middle class’ equates with the FG/NFG students. This assumes that the parents of the FG students cannot be in ‘middle class’ occupations because they do not have a degree. This is an issue which will be considered in the light of my own research findings.

Returning to figure 3.2 these potential indirect impacts of a student’s socio-biographical background are shown by dotted lines to both entrances in the social system. The indirect influence of a student’s social and biographical background may have on their pre-higher education education, as supported by the WP literature, is shown by a dotted line within the pre-university stage.

The elements of the social structure influencing employability whilst at university are defined as ‘enabling variables’ (incorporating elements 1 and 8 in table 3.2). These are the factors within a graduate’s university experience which may have had an impact on the graduate’s transition into the graduate labour market. As the research will be carried out using graduates from one institution the potential importance of institution attended (element 8) is not included. As with the prior variables they are classified into two types, direct and indirect. The direct variable in this instance is the graduate’s degree which, by definition, is an essential pre-requisite for obtaining a graduate level job.

The indirect enabling variables are shown as ‘employability enhancements, as these are other aspects of a graduate’s university experience which may have an impact on their transition into graduate employment. Employability enhancements are the opportunities provided to students, both within and around the curriculum, to improve their chances of achieving a successful transition into the graduate labour market. In this sense these indirect enabling variables are analogous to the ‘intervening variables’ of the CHERI framework. However the difference is that for my University and Faculty the enhancements were specifically aimed at *enabling* a student to make a successful transition into a graduate job, with additional resources and curriculum changes made to achieve this end (these will be discussed fully in section 4.2). The intervening variables in the CHERI framework are regarded only as

“... additional factors which *might* intervene in the relationship between social and educational factors and employment” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p.4).

Chapter 4 develops the methodology which was adopted for the evaluation part of the research however it is important at this point to reflect on the social structure developed for the research I undertook. In critical realist terms the indirect enabling variables in figure 3.2 are the potential mechanisms which are the subject of my realist evaluation. More specifically the programme of change introduced by the University and Faculty in 2006 introduced a set of new potential mechanisms into the social structure of employability. Therefore the direct enabling variables and prior variables are the context which, although of interest from a practice enhancement point of view, is not the main focus of the realist evaluation. The main focus of the research evaluation is the 2006 programme of change. This point is important as it has implications not only for the research design but also to ensure that the conflation between context and mechanism, noted in much non-critical realist research, is avoided.

3.3 A CRITICAL REALIST RE-INTERPRETATION OF ‘SUCCESSFUL’

Section 1.1 outlined the practice context which was the original starting point for my research. From this practice perspective ‘successful’ as used in the thesis title, by necessity, relates to the performance measure definition of a graduate being in a graduate level job 6 months after graduation. However this is my managerial perspective on ‘successful’ and may not actually reflect how the graduates themselves would define ‘successful’. Therefore one of the consequences of adopting a critical realist perspective on employability is the need to reconsider what constitutes ‘successful’ as used in the thesis title. The development of a critical realist view of employability as an individual and actively managed social process requires that ‘successful’ be considered from the same student perspective. Tomlinson’s work (Tomlinson 2007 and 2010) with final year students on their post-graduation aspirations offers a framework to reflect on this issue further.

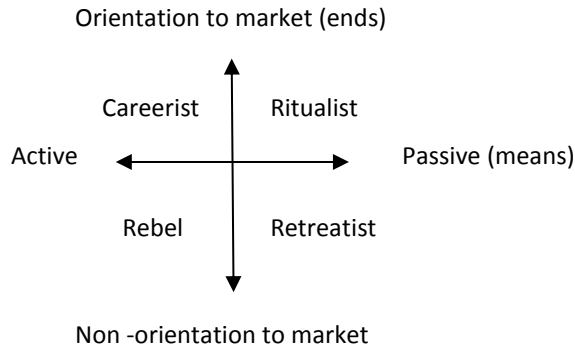
The work of Tomlinson (2007 and 2010) is written from an explicitly critical realist stance and takes a similar graduate identity based approach discussed previously in relation to Holmes (2001). However Tomlinson is more interested in “... examining how they [finalists] begin to position themselves in relation to, and develop identities

around, their future work and employability” (Tomlinson, 2007, p.287). Tomlinson conducted semi-structured interviews with 53 finalists from across different discipline areas from within the same pre-92 University. The study focuses on two particular aspects. Firstly the students’ perceptions of their future employability and career progression, and secondly how the students were managing their future employability.

As already noted Tomlinson found that the students had a strong consensus-type view of their employability, indeed this sense of self awareness went beyond their qualifications and work experience to “... factors relating to personal dispositions, attitudes and individual characteristics” (Tomlinson, 2007, p.289). However, as already noted, although these students largely regarded themselves as ‘active agents’, they were similarly guilty of “... often overlooking social and economic structures which might shape their opportunities and outcomes” (Tomlinson, 2007, p.289). Despite the unacknowledged elements of context Tomlinson notes an ‘instrumental rationality’ (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 291) which extends to recognition of the positional game to be played by students on entering the labour market. This included “... coming to view the importance of their employability into a narrative which encompassed both their hard credentials as a well as ‘soft’ currencies in terms of their experiences and achievements outside university learning” (p. 291). This echoes Purcell et al (2005) comments in relation to their “Class of ‘99” research that “... interviews provided evidence that pro-activity and persistence in pursuing career opportunities tended to have secured desired career goals” (p. 9).

The second aspect of Tomlinson’s research though relates to the finalist attitude towards work and the graduate labour market. Tomlinson develops a framework which categorises their orientation towards work and is reproduced in figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Ideal-type of student



Source: Tomlinson, 2007, p.293

Focusing on the types identified as being ‘orientated to market’, in other words those intending to obtain a successful labour market outcome, Tomlinson identifies two types - ‘careerists’ and ‘ritualists’. Students with a careerist orientation “... had developed a strong orientation around future work and careers and were more active in their attempt to realise their labour market goals and manage their employability” (p. 292). This group of students Tomlinson identified as tending to come from middle class backgrounds, with parents in managerial and professional occupations and “... in possession of the requisite social and cultural resources to negotiate the demands of the job market, as well as adequate formal or informal labour market knowledge” (p. 295). Typically they adopt a more instrumental approach to acquiring credentials and extra-curricular activities and take the human capital view that education is an investment in your future; “Many view their careers as progression in terms of ‘gaining ground’ experience, developing profile and ‘working their way up’” (p. 295).

By way of contrast the ‘ritualists’ “... were more passive in their approach ... this typically involved settling for employment which was viewed to be more secure and less competitive and where their employability could be managed” (p. 293). For ‘ritualists’

“...work is largely viewed as a means to an end and tangential to their lives as a whole. Work is something ‘you have to do’; it is a means of achieving a future income, gaining a return from education and facilitating an adult role and identity.” (p. 297)

Tomlinson suggests that ‘ritualists’ tend to be from lower middle-class backgrounds and many were FG students. They were not as prepared to play the positional competition game and tended to settle for careers where progress was easier but the rewards may be more limited. However for Tomlinson ritualists were also instrumental in their approach to their employability but “whereas the careerists took a ‘do all you can’ approach, the ritualists tended to adopt a ‘do all you need’ attitude” (p. 299).

As discussed at the outset of this section ‘success’ as used in the thesis title implies a definition taken from my practitioner perspective. However Tomlinson’s framework provides a means of assessing ‘success’ from the perspective of the graduate. For a final year student with careerist ambitions a ‘successful’ transition into the graduate labour market will be measured as having met their careerist aspiration. Settling for any other job, even a DLHE classified graduate job, would be regarded as a failure. Given the critical realist basis to my research it is important to assess whether the interviewees have actually met their pre-graduation aspirations. There is also a strong practice need to look at success from this perspective. The Faculty should be concerned if students we class as being DLHE “successes” are actually not in post-graduation jobs which fulfil their pre-graduation aspirations.

The discussion in this section has demonstrated how the adoption of a critical realist perspective has forced a reconsideration of the meaning of a ‘successful graduate outcome’. The ontological focus of the critical realist perspective means that the notion of a ‘successful outcome’ only has meaning from the graduates socially constructed view of reality. As discussed above the Tomlinson framework for post-graduation orientation provides a basis for developing this alternative view of a ‘successful outcome’ further. The also, in effect, section in effect begins to address research objective 3 (section 1.4).

3.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has been primarily concerned with addressing my second research objective in identifying and formulating an employability social structure. This has laid the basis for my research in a number of ways. Firstly by using previous

research to develop an “organising framework” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) for employability I have provided the hypothesised ‘theory’ around which both the realist evaluation of, and a wider discussion on, employability can take place. A key aspect to emerge from the discussion of the previous research is the need to distinguish clearly between elements of the social structure which are ‘context’ and those which are ‘mechanisms’. As will be discussed in chapter 4 what constitutes ‘context’ and what constitutes ‘mechanisms’ can be largely dependent on the purpose of the research and the aspect of the social structure which is of interest.

Secondly the chapter has developed the Tomlinson framework of careerist/ritualist aspirations as a means to explore the meaning of ‘successful’ from the graduates’ perspective. The discussion in section 3.3 also illustrates how the adoption of a critical realist perspective has led to a re-consideration of a key element of the research, an issue explored in more depth in chapter 5. Chapter 4 moves on to discuss the approach that was taken to undertake the research against the ‘social facts’ which this chapter has identified and developed into a social system relating to employability.

CHAPTER 4

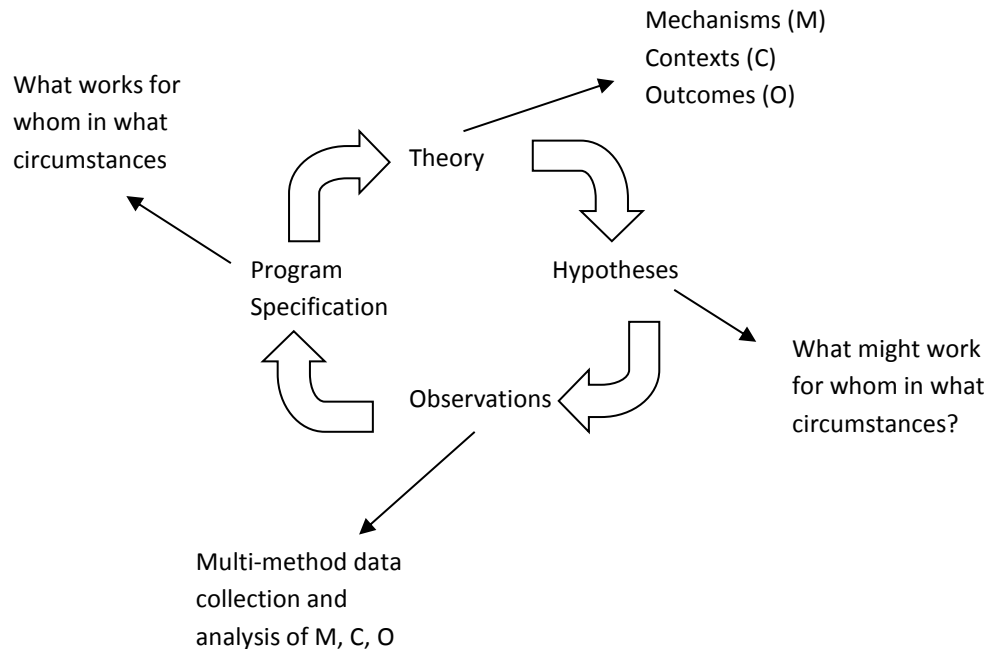
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline how the social structure identified in chapter 3 was used as the basis for exploring the research participants' successful transition into the graduate labour market. From a practice perspective the initial concern was the development of a method to allow for a realist evaluation of the programme of change consisting of the employability enhancements brought in by the University and Faculty in 2006 (research objective 1). However, as will be discussed in section 4.3, in order to reflect on possible practice enhancements a second level of evaluation was thought necessary looking at the impact of the wider social structure beyond the indirect enabling variables which defined the programme of change (research objective 4). This was also thought to be necessary as some of the literature reviewed in chapter 2 (for example Brennan and Shah, 2002; Purcell et al, 2005) suggested that context factors may also impact on the effectiveness of the programme of change.

As the basis for designing a realist evaluation Pawson and Tilley (1997) suggest a 'realist evaluation cycle' is adopted (figure 4.1) which is an adaptation of the traditional research 'wheel of science' (Wallace, 1971). This provides a useful starting point to consider how I approached my research design in relation to addressing research objective 1. The design cycle usually, although not necessarily (see Kempster and Parry, 2011), starts with the 'theory'. Pawson and Tilley define this as being "... abstract terms ... concerned with the identification and explanations of regularities". In critical realist terms this means formulating the context, mechanisms and outcomes which defines the research project. This is commonly referred to as the CMO configuration. The 'hypotheses' stage of the cycle relates to the testing of potential trigger mechanisms which might be present in the social structure. This is the core of the realist evaluation process as the researcher tries to gauge whether the programme of change has actually lead to any changed behaviour on the part of the recipients which has improved the outcome. The data collection stage ('observations') for a realist evaluation is guided by the CMO configuration and the mechanisms which form the programme of change. Finally the cycle is

completed by analysis of the data and coming to conclusions on ‘what works for whom in what circumstances’.

Figure 4.1 – The realist evaluation cycle



Based on Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.85

As was discussed in section 1.3 the area where realist evaluation is being increasingly used in health policy research (see for example Timmins and Miller, 2007; Ogrinc and Batalden, 2009; Wand, White and Patching, 2010; Whitelaw et al, 2010; Maluka et al, 2011; Pommier, Guevel and Jourdan, 2010; Ranmuthugala et al, 2011). In designing the research most of these researchers follow the realist evaluation cycle, usually adopting a staged approach based on that outlined above. I essentially followed a similar approach for the initial phase of the evaluation. Chapter 3 has begun the process of defining the CMO configuration by formulating a social structure of employability and will be developed further in section 4.1. The actual programme of change will be outlined in section 4.2 (the ‘hypotheses’ part of the cycle). The ‘observation’ process will be outlined on section 4.3 and the exploration of the data (‘program specification’) in chapter 5.

However in order to achieve my research objectives fully I need to take my evaluation of the data further than that suggested by the research design cycle. Whilst the process outlined above (and applied in section 4.1) will allow for a realist evaluation of the programme of change it shares the same outcomes focus of a more positivist evaluation. As such it will allow me to identify ‘what works for whom in what circumstances’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) but not to explore, from a critical realist perspective how the individuals actively affect not only the employment outcome but also their employability. Therefore there needs to be a more ontologically focused aspect to the evaluation exploring the social reality created by the interviewees as they encountered the social system of employability. This deeper analysis, moving away from the narrative accounts of the interviewees, will provide me with a different perspective on the practice issues involved and possible enhancements to be made.

4.1 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The main purpose of this section is to outline how the basic principles of designing a realist evaluation were used to define my own research project. In terms of the realist evaluation cycle we are completing the ‘theory’ and ‘hypotheses’ sections of the cycle.

4.1.1 Defining the CMO configuration

The principle purpose of chapter 3 was to formulate from previous research the social structure of employability which defines our ‘organising framework’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This was formally presented as figure 3.2. However as was noted in chapter 3 one of the weaknesses from a critical realist perspective of previous research is the conflation of context and mechanism. Central to my own realist evaluation therefore, is the need to make clear the distinction between the context and the potential mechanisms within the social structure.

As was discussed in section 3.2 all the prior and enabling variables of figure 3.2 are possible factors which previous research suggests may impact on graduate employability. As was also discussed in section 3.2 some of the variables will be context variables which form part of the pre-existing social structure (for example whether they are a FG student) and some will be mechanisms which require students

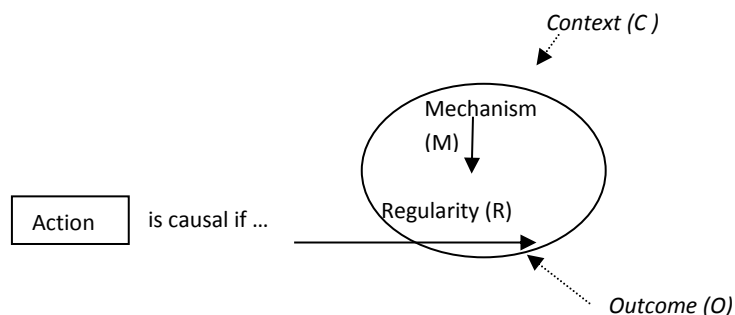
to make a choice. However the primary focus of my research is on the employability enhancements the graduates had the opportunity to experience whilst at University, the indirect enabling variables of figure 3.2. Therefore for my research the other potential causal factors in figure 3.2, which pre-date the graduate's interaction with the employability enhancements, are part of the pre-existing real context. The 'structures, practices and conventions' relating to the graduate labour market entrance are similarly a part of the social system the employability enhancements are trying to impact upon.

The CMO framework developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997) helps the researcher to focus on which part of the social structure is being evaluated with the set of potential trigger mechanisms being referred to as the programme of change. The approach revolves around the simple equation:

$$\text{OUTCOME} = \text{MECHANISM} + \text{CONTEXT}$$

Programmes of change which are the subject of a particular evaluation introduce new mechanisms into an existing social structure aimed at improving the pre-defined outcome. Therefore, for Pawson and Tilley (1997): "...programs work (have successful 'outcomes') only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities ('mechanisms') to groups in the appropriate social and cultural conditions ('contexts')" (p. 56). Figure 4.2 represents pictorially the basic Pawson and Tilley framework for designing a realist evaluation.

Figure 4.2 – Framework for realist evaluations



... its outcome is triggered by a mechanism acting in context

Based on Pawson and Tilley, 1997 and Pawson, 2006

The diagram captures the essence of the critical realist perspective on evaluation. At its core critical realist evaluation is concerned with investigating the relationships between the elements of a pre-existing social structure (context) and the potential impact of a programme of change (trigger mechanisms) on individual agents in relation to the outcome.

Figure 4.3 – The generic CMO of the research

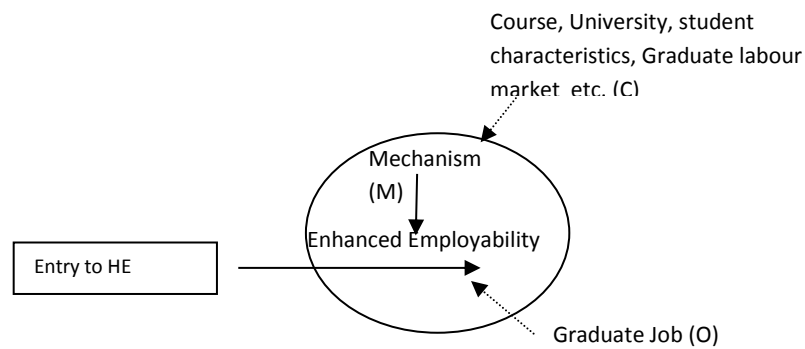
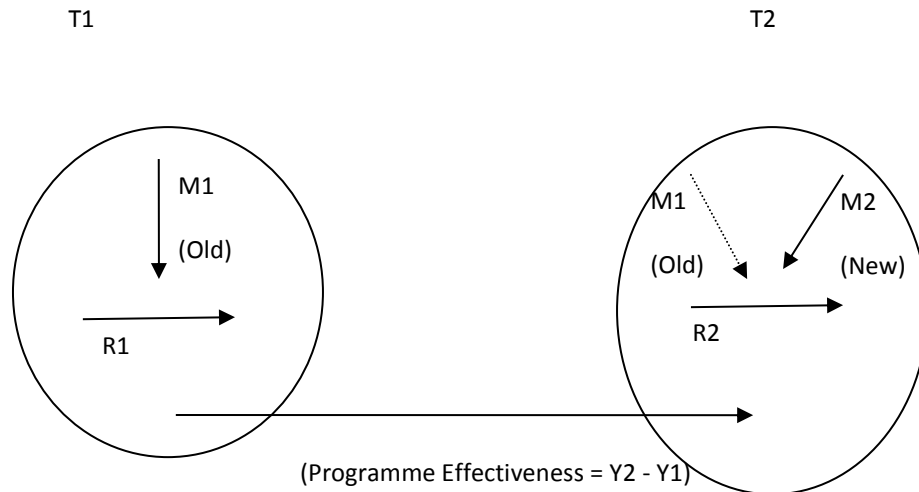


Figure 4.3 is a condensed version of figure 3.2 showing the underlying generic CMO configuration for my research and helps to clarify the distinction between context and mechanisms. The initial focus for the evaluation was on the employability enhancements introduced in 2006 which represents a programme of change. The other factors identified in figure 3.2 represent the context with the graduate job being the outcome. The purpose of the realist evaluation is to explore whether any of the potential employability enhancements were thought to have been beneficial to the participants in securing their graduate job. Through the process of exploring this with my interviewees regularities were sought which are indicative of contingent causality.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) expand their basic framework to highlight the purpose of a programme of change in terms of improving performance (figure 4.4). Within this framework T1 represents the original social structure which contains a potential mechanism M1 which, when triggered, causes outcome Y1. Similarly T2 represents the social structure in a later time period after a change programme, M2, has been introduced. The assumption is that the purpose of the programme of change is to trigger the regularity R2 and hence improving outcome Y2. An improvement in Y2 indicates that the change programme has successfully replaced M1 with M2. As

Pawson and Tilley put it “...it is not programs that work but their ability to break into existing chains of resources and reasoning that lead to the ‘problem’” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 75)

Figure 4.4 – Impact of a programme of change

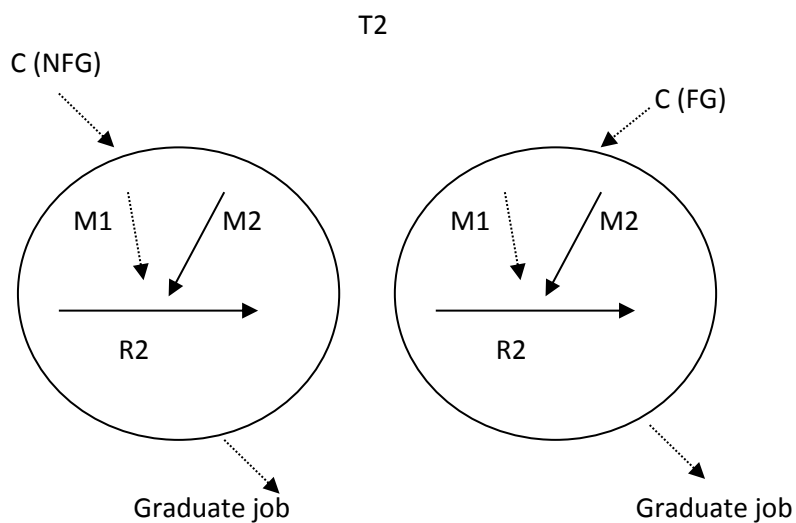


Therefore the employability enhancements represent a programme of change which was introduced into an existing social structure. In terms of figure 4.4 T1 would represent the pre-2006 social structure and T2 the post-2006 social structure. As was highlighted in chapter 1 the practice context is that the outcome, as measured by the DLHE returns, has shown a year-on-year improvement since the 2006 cohort graduated in 2009. However this does not mean that this specific programme of change was the cause. The purpose of the first part of the evaluation is to clarify whether the programme of change played an instrumental part in this upward trend.

There is an additional aspect to making a clear distinction between context and mechanism which also needs to be considered. As was noted in chapter 3 there is significant evidence from previous research of a contextual dependency in relation to some of the potential employability trigger mechanisms. As will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3 some of the motivation behind the enhancements adopted was an implicit recognition of the possible context differences between FG and NFG

students. This concern is reflected in the thesis title as one practice concern is whether the enhancements actually had a greater impact on the FG graduates. Therefore we are essentially concerned with two possible contexts. These are closely aligned but differ in one context element which is whether the graduate was a first generation university graduate. Figure 4.5 summaries this variant on the underlying CMO configuration of the research.

Figure 4.5 FG and NFG CMO configuration



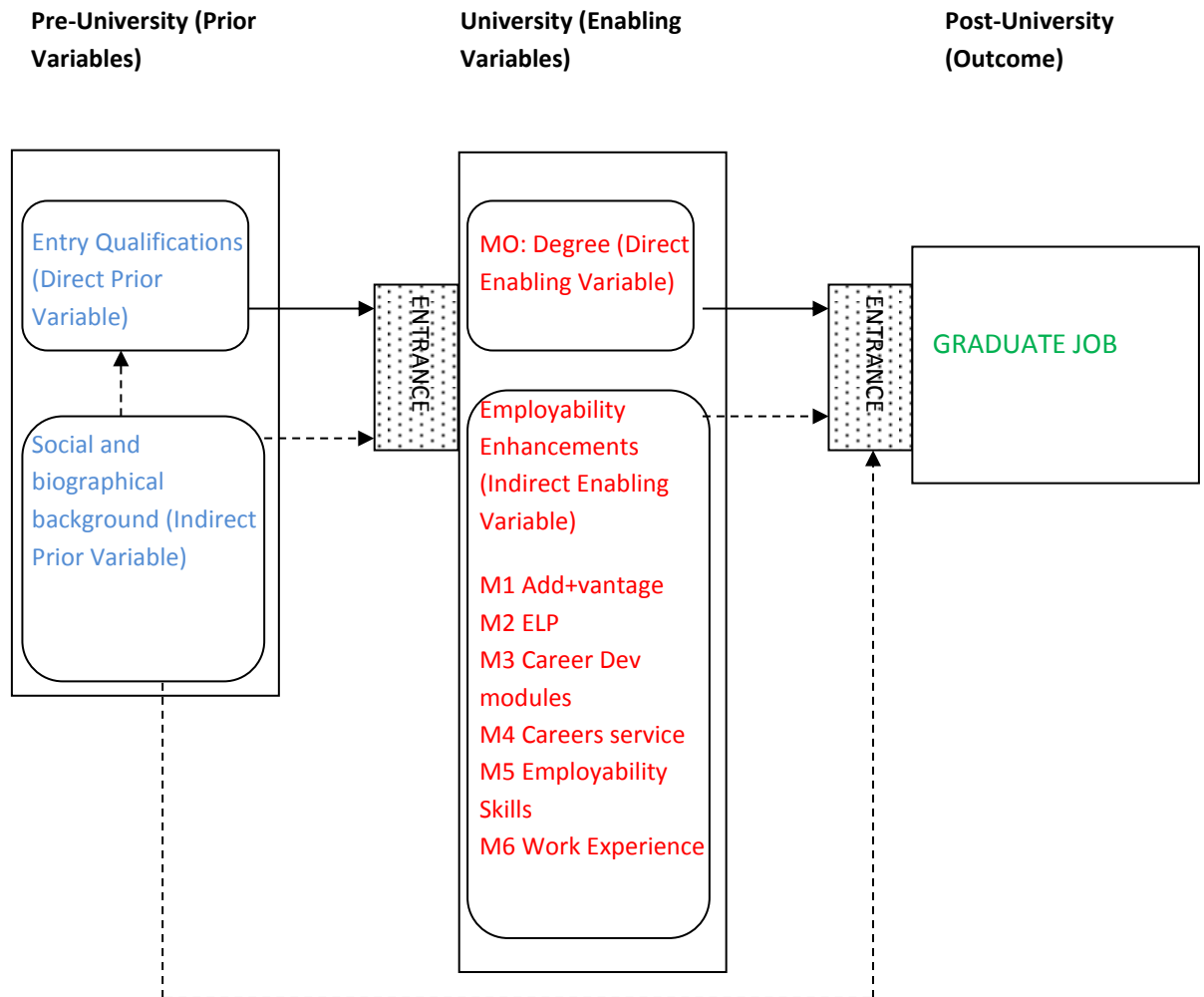
Therefore bringing all these elements together figure 4.6 summarises the overall CMO configuration which forms the basis of my realist evaluation. However as noted we need to bear in mind that there is a slight variation in the prior indirect variables between FG and NFG. The employability enhancements which were evaluated are shown as M1 to M6 and define the programme of change to be evaluated. Obtaining the degree is also a mechanism (shown as M0) but as discussed previously this is an essential pre-requisite to gaining a graduate level and is therefore treated as a direct enabling variable and is not part of the programme of change.

Figure 4.6 – CMO Configuration for research

Context in BLUE

Mechanisms in RED

Outcome in GREEN



This section has therefore presented the CMO configuration used for my research. The clarifying of this configuration is the starting point of the realist evaluation cycle of figure 4.1 and is important in distinguishing context from mechanisms. Figure 4.6 highlights the programme of change to be evaluated, the ‘hypotheses’ stage of the cycle. However, before moving onto explore the ‘observation’ stage we need to consider two other aspects of the research design. Firstly the nature of the programme of change and secondly the extent to which closure of the system was achieved.

4.1.2 The Programme of Change

The programme of change was introduced in 2006 and formed part of a major review of the undergraduate curriculum. As part of this review the University adopted a definition of employability which was closely based on the Yorke (2004) definition discussed in section 2.3.

At the same time the University set performance targets based on the DLHE returns, initially in terms of graduate employment but later adjusted to positive destinations¹. To support this new focus on employability the University instigated a number of initiatives centrally which were required to be adopted across all the undergraduate courses. My role at the time was Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programmes therefore it was my responsibility to ensure that the university initiatives were implemented across my Faculty's undergraduate courses.

At the time I was aware of the first CHERI study (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002) and the Mason et al study (Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003). In my view, whilst supporting the added emphasis on employability by the University, I felt that based on this research, and my own experience, that the central initiatives did not pay sufficient regard to two areas. Firstly the central importance of work experience evident in much of the research and secondly the need to provide employability 'skills' and personal development within a course context and not through bolted-on modules.

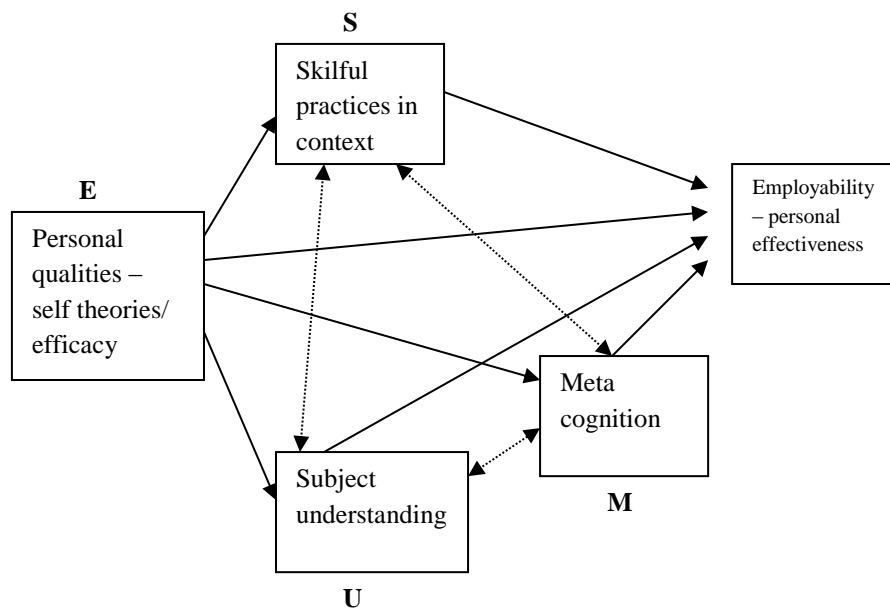
The approach and initiatives adopted by myself at Faculty level were also heavily influenced by the work of the ESECT team. ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) were a central government funded learning and teaching support network (LTSN) generic centre. Over two series of papers (www.heacademy.ac.uk/employability.htm) members of ESECT used the Yorke definition of employability, discussed in section 2.3, to develop what they referred to as the USEM model of employability. The USEM model in effect operationalises the first part of the definition of employability; "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain

¹ 'Positive destinations' includes all graduates in graduate level jobs plus those engaged in Post-Graduate study. Within the Faculty the Law school was at a disadvantage based on the 'Graduate Destination' definition as approximately 40% of graduates go onto professional training

employment”. What the ESECT team tried to do was to provide an approach to employability which had “... a more scientific substantiation than the old notions that employability = skills” (Knight and Yorke, 2004, p. 42). The USEM model focuses on the argument that students need to develop a greater awareness of their employability attributes when preparing to enter the labour market. Indeed not only do students need to recognise their “... skills, understandings and personal attributes” but they also have to know how to showcase them to prospective employers.

This standpoint was translated by the ESECT team into a model of employability as shown in figure 4.7

Figure 4.7 – The USEM model of Employability



Source – Yorke. 2007

The four USEM elements shown in figure 4.7 in effect breakdown into two broad areas: Knowledge and Self. The two knowledge elements (U and S) reflect Eraut’s (Eraut, 1992) distinction between ‘propositional knowledge’ (U – subject understanding) i.e. ‘knowing that’ and ‘process knowledge’ (S - skilful practices in context.i.e. ‘knowing how’. The self (E – self efficacy and M - metacognition) elements draw on the work of the psychologists Dweck (1999) and Bandura (1997). The element of the framework ‘E’ refers to a student’s self-efficacy. Efficacy refers to the belief that you can make an impact on situations and events which in turn

relates to self-theories “... a class of beliefs that affect the ways in which people, even high achievers, respond to new and difficult problems” (Knight and Yorke, 2004, p. 38). Metacognition again draws on psychology and the awareness of what you know, can do and how you can learn more, “... metacognition is about being mindful and disposed to keep learning” (Yorke and Knight, 2004, p. 38).

There are clear connections in this approach to the wider work on student identities and employability discussed previously (Tomlinson, 2007 and 2010; Holmes, 2001 and Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), particularly Tomlinson’s careerist/ ritualist dichotomy (Tomlinson, 2007) discussed in section 3.3. From a personal perspective the attraction of the USEM model at the time was twofold. Firstly it provided cohesiveness to the Faculty’s employability strategy based on the broader research I was aware of at the time. Secondly it also focused on the importance of the student’s wider university experience. Appendix 6a is the short strategy paper produced in 2006 by myself showing how the USEM elements relate to the broad employability strategy of the Faculty and University. At the time the paper was written I was not aware of the work of Brown et al (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004) and the distinction they make between consensus and conflict views of employability (section 2.3). However my concern for the high proportion of FG students within the Faculty, and my perception that they lacked the social and cultural capital to compete effectively in the graduate labour market, suggests that I was implicitly adopting a conflict perspective on employability.

Also, from experience, I was aware of the low aspirations and lack of confidence many of our students exhibited therefore the self-efficacy element of USEM was, for me, particularly important. Some support for this view is evident in the WP literature referred to previously. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010), for example, refer to “.... a sense of self-doubt and anxiety around learning” (p. 117) evident in working class students. From experience the sense of “self-doubt and anxiety” extended beyond learning.

Although I was not aware of the fact at the time the USEM influenced approach adopted by the Faculty does lean towards a critical realist conceptualisation of employability. The USEM framework implicitly recognises that each student’s employability is unique to them. There is also the emphasis on the importance of the

individual student managing their employability and how they present themselves to potential employers or, as put by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) “.... the need to develop and effectively present the kinds of personal qualities demanded by employers if they are to stand a chance” (p. 319).

Therefore the programme of change M1 to M6 in figure 4.6 represent a mix of University and Faculty initiatives aimed at enhancing student employability. The individual aspects of the programme of change are detailed below

M1 The Add+vantage scheme – these are centrally commissioned 10 credit modules whose purpose is to enhance a student’s employability. Students are required to include an add+vantage module at each stage of their programme and have to pass the modules to successfully achieve their award.

M2 The Employability Learning Package (ELP) – this was developed jointly with the add+vantage scheme and comprises of short on-line assessments aimed at allowing students to develop some basic career development skills such as CV writing, self-reflection and job-search. Successful completion of the ELP assessments was similarly required in order for a student to gain their award.

M3 Personal Development/ Career Development modules – This was a Faculty initiative. All course teams were asked to develop modules which complemented the add+vantage scheme and ELP by providing more course-specific career development support. The intention was that these modules would provide more course focused support for students in terms of preparing them for labour market entry and would include job seeker skills, CV writing and talks from employers, particularly alumni.

M4 Significant additional resources for the Careers service – the University made significant additional investment in the careers services in terms of staffing and resources. Careers staff were also partially embedded and located within the Faculties for half of their time.

M5 Employability skills All of the courses included in the research sample (see section 4.2.2) already had the traditional employability ‘skills’ of team working, communication and presentation skills within their courses.

However the decision was taken to embed them within subject modules rather than operate as separate modules. The approach closely matches the 'explicit embedding and integration' model identified by Cranmer in her typology of skills teaching (Cranmer, 2006, p.172) as they were explicitly taught and assessed within a subject context.

M6 Work Experience add+vantage modules – the Faculty developed a range of work experience modules to be offered through the add+vantage scheme. We also worked with other parts of the University, such as the students union and the recruitment and admissions office, to provide the opportunity for students who work as, for example, student ambassadors or undertake community volunteering work, to also gain academic credit under the add+vantage scheme.

In addition to the above the Faculty also established an Employability and Placements Unit (EPU). The purpose of the EPU was to provide a central point within the Faculty for the co-ordinating, developing and supporting of work experience opportunities for students. Each Department was required to have an employability tutor who had the responsibility for acting as an employability champion plus providing a direct link between the EPU and Departments within the Faculty. However the unit was not established until early 2007 and not fully operational in a purpose built base until early 2008. Therefore the decision was taken not to include this initiative as part of the 2006 programme of change to be evaluated.

With the exception of the Personal Development/ Career Development modules all of the employability enhancements M1 to M6 were implemented for students who commenced their courses in 2006. The incorporation of Personal Development/ Career Development modules was less uniform across the Faculty with the majority of course teams going some way to building these into their courses in the way envisaged by the Faculty strategy paper (appendix 6a). However notably Law and Accounting and Finance did not. What is also interesting is that the programme of change actually includes two of the three potential mechanisms uncovered by Brennan and Shah (2003) and igraduate (2011b) and discussed in section 3.1. The two potential mechanisms being the incorporation of academic credit for 'extra-

curricular' activities (the add+vantage scheme) and the engaging of students with alumni through the career development modules.

4.1.3 Achieving Methodological Closure

Section 2.2 identified that one of the key differences between critical realism and positivist research methods was the rejection by critical realists of the ability to achieve complete closure of a social system. However as was also discussed in section 2.2 the notion that a system is either open or closed is too strict an assumption to make (Mearman, 2006). Critical realists reject an imposed assumption about agents' behaviour as a means of achieving consistency and allowing a social system to be ontologically closed. However, treating a social system as completely open is also not accepted by critical realists. The fact that a social system exists in a specific time and place provides a degree of closure to any social system (Kemp and Holmwood, 2003). Mearman (2006) argues that researchers can also bring about degrees of partial closure to a system by limiting the scope of the research and focusing on those elements which are relevant to the research issue. Olsen and Morgan (2005) refer to this process as 'methodological closure'. At the core of achieving methodological closure is the need to achieve some degree of stability in a social system to allow for regularities indicative of potential causal relationships to emerge.

In relation to realist evaluation to try and bring about some partial methodological closure we need to seek to limit the potential impacts of aspects of the context on the potential trigger mechanisms under investigation. The approach summarised in Figure 4.4 of a social system as existing in two time periods differentiated by a programme of change achieves the time and space closure referred to by Kemp and Holmwood (2003) and Mearman (2006). Thus the university experience of employability enhancements for the pre-2006 cohorts are different than those for the post-2006 cohorts. However to address my research question I needed to provide some further partial closure to the system.

As was noted in chapter 3 previous employability research suggests that mechanisms actually triggering behaviour in students leading to enhanced employability can be dependent on a number of contextual factors. However for much of the previous research into employability discussed in chapter 3 methodological closure was not

really an issue, even where the research has an explicit or implicit critical realist perspective. Unlike previous research though, where the emphasis was on the issues around impact factors on employability in general, the issue for me is related to differences between first generation and non-first generation graduates. There is therefore a need to try and close the social system of figure 3.2 to some of the other identified employability impacts (summarised in figure 3.2). This will allow for the focus of the evaluation to be on the potential differences between FG and NFG graduate.

Although this was the primary focus of the evaluation undertaken it was accepted that not all the other aspects of context could be closed out. The fact that the critical realists' view of employability is based on an individual's self-perception means that the impact this may have on the graduate's interpretation of, and reaction to, the employability enhancements cannot be ignored. Previous research (Brennan and Shah, 2003; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005) suggests that a student's social and biographical background may be a factor in how the employability enhancements are interpreted. Equally, when undertaking the research there was a recognition that other trigger mechanisms, not initially considered, may also emerge from the research. Both of these issues are considered as part of the analysis of the research findings.

Partial closure of the social system for employability was achieved by limiting the range of the research in the manner suggested by Mearman (2006). This was done by selecting potential interviewees to a set of selection criteria. The selection criteria aimed to reduce the number of context variables which may influence the potential impact of the mechanisms under investigation. The selection criteria are considered each in turn below.

Institution attended – all the graduates were from the same University. Although this does not remove the problem of potential institutional bias in the labour market (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005) it does help to mitigate the impact. Also potentially the same argument could be made for the impact of any institutional habitus (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010) suggesting some consistency by the graduates in the reasons

for their original choice of that University. In this sense the research sample is closer to that used by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) and Tomlinson (2007) however, for reasons discussed below, I chose to use graduates from a narrower range of subject areas.

Degree subject – to ensure that the graduates came from similar course backgrounds the decision was taken to focus on graduates from the Business School part of the Faculty rather than the less obviously vocational areas in the social science and humanities departments. However the decision was also taken not to include any graduates from BA Accountancy. This course has significant professional body exemptions which may be regarded as an additional employability factor for those graduates. The Law graduates were also excluded for similar reasons. Graduates from the BA Business and Accounting course were also initially excluded due to the fact that this course did not include any career development modules. However, for reasons discussed in section 4.2.3, the final interview sample did include a BA Business and Accounting graduate.

Degree class – there is strong evidence from the research discussed in chapter 3 to suggest that a ‘good’ degree (first class and upper second) is not just an empirical domain trigger mechanism but a deep domain generative mechanism. Therefore confining the sample set to graduates with good degrees removes this as a potential distorting factor when looking for other potential mechanisms.

Sandwich work experience – as with degree class previous research, discussed in chapter 3, suggests that this may also be a generative mechanism. Therefore none of the graduates interviewed had undertaken a credited full year sandwich work experience as part of their degree courses. This criterion also meant that BA Business Studies graduates were excluded from the sample as a credited sandwich placement is a mandatory requirement of their course.

More generally the research focuses on those students who are deemed, from a practice perspective, as being a ‘success’. As has already been discussed the definition of ‘success’ from this point of view applies to those graduates who have

achieved both a good degree (first class or upper second) and a graduate level job, as defined by DLHE. In terms of methodological closure, focusing on successful graduates means that any factors in their social and biographical backgrounds that previous research (impact factors 3-6 in table 3.2) shows may have been a mobility barrier into a graduate job appears to have been overcome. However this is not to deny the potential impact of these factors on a graduate's journey, indeed they cannot be isolated from the FG and NFG issues to be investigated. But unlike much of the employability and WP literature discussed in chapter 3, they are not the central focus of the research.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

4.2.1 The data collection instrument

As was discussed in section 1.4 my initial approach to data collection was one based on developing a data set which could be used to undertake a statistical analysis. Critical realist critics of orthodox economics research (Lawson, 1998; Mearman, 2006; Lewis, 2009) suggest that economics is a "... discipline dominated by methods" (Mearman, 2006, p.54). Given that my own discipline area is economics it is perhaps not surprising that I therefore began with this orthodox economist's approach.

However by adopting a critical realist approach to the research I was adopting a philosophical view of social reality which was not wedded to any specific research method. Indeed with the emphasis being on understanding phenomenon through how agents' construct a reality within a hypothesised social structure, critical realism "... embraces *all* social sciences" (Lewis, 2009, p.112). As suggested by Lewis critical realists' start with the phenomenon and use the methods (and reference frame) of an area of social science which is most useful given the issue and the empirical evidence. As summarised by Lewis (2009) "What critical realism *can* dois to provide general guidance as to what, given the broad features of social reality, are likely to be productive methods of research" (p. 115). In other words critical realist research starts with the phenomena to be explained and works back to an appropriate discourse and research method. This is in direct contrast to orthodox economists who begin with a research method and create a social world which allows the phenomenon to be investigated.

Thus, as discussed in section 2.2, the approach adopted by economists to investigating the ‘residual factor’ in economic growth noted by Denison (1964) was to build closed system models to allow for the statistical testing of variables which were assumed to impact on growth. The problem for critical realists with this approach would not lie in the statistical methods used, or the economics frame of reference, both of which may be the most appropriate given the phenomenon being investigated. However the assumption of system closure, achieved partly by the assumption of rational behaviour, and the resulting conflation of the empirical and deep domains would be an issue. By this process economists assume that any causal relationships found are context-free generative mechanisms rather than relationships which are contingent on the context of the model being investigated.

Considering the use of realist evaluation in health policy there is a diversity of research methods evident, reflecting Lewis’s view of the plurality of critical realist research. For example Van Belle et al (2010) and Ranmuthugala (2011) use semi-structured interviews; Maluka (2011) uses a range of qualitative methods including documentary analysis; whereas Pommier et al (2010) use mixed methods, including statistical analysis. Miller and Tsang (2010) suggest another factor in this plurality of methods used reflects different aspects of social reality which different research is focusing on. Therefore what they refer to as ‘extensive research’ (p. 151) where the focus is on the ‘outcome’ part of the CMO configuration taken from across a range of cases, is more suited to quantitative methods. Thus the statistical analysis of Pommier et al (2010) is concerned with assessing the effectiveness of a schools health programme based on data from 6 different regions of France. However where the research is of a more ‘intensive’ nature, focusing on the mechanisms within a particular CMO configuration, then a qualitative approach is more appropriate. Thus Van Belle et al (2010) and Ranmuthugala (2011), who are both interested in assessing the effectiveness of specific programmes of change, adopt a research method based on semi-structured interviews.

My own research is of the intensive type with a programme of change aimed at enhancing employability within a specific defined context being central to the process. The principle aim of the research is to explore the impact of the mechanisms identified in figure 4.6 on the social reality created by students who successfully made the transition into a graduate job. However what is also being explored is how

the graduates perceive the wider causal relationships implicit in figure 4.6, some of which they may not be aware of. The critical realist conceptualisation of employability considers that the graduates, through their actions and decisions, are active participants in the development of their employability. Therefore the most appropriate method to explore these issues is through direct interviews with successful graduates meeting the selection criteria.

The use of interviews for critical realist research is fundamentally different than when used in relativist research. Unlike relativists' research, critical realists already have a deductive model/ theory/ social structure which define the social context, rather than the inductive approach taken by the relativist. Using Pawson and Tilley's phrase the interview is 'theory driven' and not 'data-driven', "... the researchers' theory is the subject matter of the interview, and the subject (stakeholder) is there to confirm, to falsify and, above all, to refine that theory" (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 155). This is in contrast to the data-driven relativist approach where "... the subject and the subject matter of the interview are one and the same thing" (p. 155). Therefore, on one level, the critical realist interview can be seen as an exchange of ideas and perceptions between the researcher and interviewee about the researchers' theory.

However the interview is not an interview of equals. Pawson and Tilley (1997) refer to the 'division of expertise' (p. 160) in exploring any given social system and programme of change. There is the need to make a distinction between subjects, practitioners and evaluators each of whom will have their perceptions of the social system and will be able to learn from each other. Thus the graduates interviewed, as those who have experienced the employability enhancements, will be in a much better position to assess the impact these have had on their successful graduate market outcome. Therefore the interviews provide data for the research on the empirical domain through the graduates' narratives of the perceived impacts on their employability. However my own interpretation of the data will also consider the possible impacts of the graduates' socio-biographical background which they may either not be conscious of or, as in the case of Moreau and Leathwood's (2006) interviewees, actually deny. The other aspect to this is also the possibility that the interviewee may reveal aspects of the social structure which have had an impact on them which the researcher has not taken into account.

Therefore, as referred to by Kempster and Parry (2011), critical realism allows for researchers not to be tied to the data in the way that more positivist research is. The possible identification of ‘missing elements’ from an ontologically focused research method allows for a richer evaluative process. As a result future programme improvements can be made on the basis of research evidence. Focusing on outcomes rather than mechanisms, as statistical analysis tends to, may tell you what has worked but offer no clues as to how to improve the programme to make it work better. From a practitioner point of view the need is to be able to make programme improvements not simply to know that it has, or has not worked. These considerations also lead me to use semi-structured interviews, rather than completely open interviews, as the main data collection tool. Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to the semi-structured interview as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (p.101). The purpose in this case being to explore the programme of change and ‘test’ the wider social structure of employability, particularly the comparative experiences of the FG and NFG graduates.

Appendix 2b shows the interview schedule used and follows the approach suggested by Robson (2002, p. 227-229) with key lead questions, but allowing for some deviation and follow up probe questions. The structure of the questionnaire was devised to enable the collection of data which would allow me to meet the objectives of the research and reflects the hypothesised social structure of employability developed in chapter 3. Within the interview schedule area 3 is central to addressing the issue of the effectiveness of the employability enhancements with a direct question relating to each of M1-M6 plus any other mechanisms which may be missing. Areas 1 and 2 provide data concerning the prior variables relating to the interviewees pre-university and socio-biographical background with the key contextual factor being previous family experience of higher education. Area 4 of the interview schedule relates directly to the issue of the interpretation of ‘successful’, although other areas of the interview also provide data on this issue.

Area 5 was intended to reflect the idea discussed above that the interview was a shared experience with the interviewee also learning from the experience. Therefore the opportunity was provided for the interviewee to reflect on their experiences. However, in practice, this question also provided some interesting data on the interviewee’s self-perception. The Likert scale at the end of the interview was used

as a means of confirmation of the consistency of responses in the other parts of the interview. Likert scales have been used in previous realist evaluations (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Wand et al, 2010) but as a means of providing some quasi-statistical basis to the research, this was not my intention.

The decision was also taken to conduct face-to-face interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly the use of a semi-structured interview approach lends itself much better to face-to-face interviews with the ability to build-up a rapport with the interviewee before the interview commences. Secondly the face-to-face interview allows for a better "... distribution of interactive power" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p.180) and the appearance of an everyday conversation. As expanded on by Holstein and Gubrium "Both parties have the opportunity to raise topics, request clarification, change the subject, interrupt, and otherwise act conversationally normally" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p.180). This fits with the idea that a realist interview is a joint exploration of the researcher's ideas and theories. Thirdly given the above two reasons face-to-face interviews was considered the best means of ensuing consistency in terms of responses to interview questions. The final reason was personal preference as I have always felt more comfortable with face-to-face interviews rather than the more impersonal telephone approach. The use of SKYPE was suggested to a couple of potential interviewees, however the interviewees were not amenable to this suggestion.

4.2.2 Ethical considerations

Appendix 1 includes documents relating to the ethics approval obtained prior to the interviews taking place plus the participant consent form signed by all interviewees prior to the interview. All interviewees were sent an outline of the research and arrangements were made via email and/or telephone for the interviews to take. Interviewees were not sent copies of the questions before hand nor were there any discussion of areas and issues relating to the interview content before the recorded interview took place. This was to ensure that all data used in the research was captured in the recorded interviews. All interviews took place face-to-face under the conditions agreed as part of the ethics approval. The graduates and their employers are not referred to by name within the thesis and the original interview recordings are held on a secure part of my own University's network.

The key broader ethical concern related to my position of being an insider researcher combined with my senior management position within the Faculty. In relation to the interviewees I ensured that none of them had been known to me during their time in the Faculty and none were undertaking post-graduate study within the Faculty. Prior to the interview commencing the interviewees' were requested not to refer to any member of staff directly by name. Although I have no line management responsibility for staff within the academic departments my position does give me a degree of influence over Heads of Department which could potentially be used inappropriately. In the event a number of interviewees did refer to members of staff but only in a positive way (their names have been removed from the interview transcripts in appendix 3).

On a more personal level I was aware that in reference back to Pawson and Tilley's 'division of expertise' discussed in the previous section I was actually both the practitioner and evaluator. By implication some of the findings of the research may be (and indeed were) critical of decisions taken by myself in the past. In a sense this will always tend to be an issue when undertaking research into your own practice, particularly for managers evaluating past policy decisions. However, from a critical realist perspective, the context within which I acted as a practitioner in 2006 is different from the context I am now acting in as an evaluator. As discussed in chapter 2 one aspect of context is the 'stock of intellectual resources' (Fleetwood, 2004) of the researcher. One parallel aspect of the context relating to policy implementation could also be the experience and capabilities of the manager implementing the policy. Both the intellectual resources and the experience and capabilities of a manager develop over time. Thus in my practitioner role of 2005/6 my perception of employability was based on a limited reading of the literature plus I was new to the Associate Dean role. However by the time I assumed the role of evaluator I was much more familiar with the employability literature plus I had 5 years' experience as an Associate Dean. Therefore, in critical realist terms, the context for the evaluator role was different than the original practitioner role. More generally the motivations behind the research were evidence-based practice improvement, I was not seeking a justification for previous policy decisions.

4.2.3 Sample selection and the interview process

The University's student record systems were used to generate the list of potential interviewees. Lists of graduates from 2010 and 2009 with First Class or Upper Second Class degrees from the Business School courses which matched the selection criteria were paired with the graduates' original correspondence email addresses provided when they first enrolled at the university. The original intention had been to email the graduates in separate tranches. The reason for not emailing all the graduates at once was to enable me to monitor response rates and try to select a representative sample from across the courses, location and type of job they were doing. However, after the first two mailings of around 70 graduates only 1 of the 25 responses was from a NFG graduate. Therefore for the next two mailings the email message was amended to ask for only responses from NFG. This produced another 4 responses from NFG, but 2 were on postgraduate courses and 1 was working in Italy. Therefore having emailed all the potential graduates according to my original criteria I had only 2 NFG as potential interviewees.

The decision was therefore taken to contact graduates from the BA Business and Accounting courses despite the fact that they had taken a course which did not have career development modules (M3). This produced a response from a further 2 graduates, only 1 of whom was in a graduate level job. Although he had taken a year's work experience between year 2 and 3 this had been as a gap year rather than as a credited part of his course.

Table 4.1 – Sample Selection Data

Graduates contacted	Total FG responses (possible interviewees)	Total NFG responses (possible interviewees)	Total not in a graduate level job	Total in PG study	No response	Email account inactive
180	36 (21)	7 (3)	8	8	76	35

Table 4.1 summarises the contacts made and the response. From the 21 possible FG interviewees 7 were interviewed. All 3 of the NFG possible interviewees were

interviewed making an interview sample of 10. The selection of the 7 FG interviewees was based on gaining a spread across degree subject, location, occupational sector and nature of their job plus other practicalities such as determining a mutually agreeable time and date. Appendix 2a provides pen portraits of the 10 interviewees.

The imbalance between FG and NFG was not an ideal outcome as I would have preferred a 50-50 split. However the 70-30 split is probably a better reflection of the FG/NFG split within the degree courses used for the research. Also, as discussed further in section 4.3.2, the critical realist nature of the research does limit the validity of any findings to the specific context of the research. In this sense the imbalance is largely irrelevant, even with a 50-50 split the research findings would still only have had validity within that specific context.

However the difficulty encountered in finding NFG interviewees is an interesting outcome of the selection process. Given that the overall proportion of these graduates is thought to be around 35% of the total in the Faculty, although as discussed previously it is actually difficult to gain an accurate figure, it's surprising that they accounted for only about 16% of responses. A number of questions could be asked. Is the actual number of NFG students in the Faculty considerably lower than I assumed? Are NFG graduates more likely to go onto PG study? Are they more likely to delay entry into the graduate labour market? Do they obtain proportionally fewer good degrees? These issues are beyond the remit of this research project however are worthy of further investigation.

4.3 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

As was discussed in section 4.2.1 critical realist research in starting with the phenomenon to be explored and working back to the most appropriate research method does lead to a plurality of possible analytical approaches. The initial focus in my research was on the effectiveness of mechanisms within a specific CMO configuration. This, as discussed in the section 4.2, lead me to a research method based on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. Robson (2002) and Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate a general analytical approach for qualitative data based on the three stage process of data reduction, data display and finally conclusion and verification.

What is evident from the previous realist evaluative research discussed in section 4.2 is that the data reduction method used also reflects a plurality of approaches based on the purpose of the research. However the underlying purpose of data reduction for a critical realist is to allow for the deconstruction of the data and a reconstruction which reflects the underlying hypothesised social structure. The purpose of the data display is to allow for the analysis of the data and the identification of either context specific demi-regs (in intensive research) or deep domain context-free generative mechanisms (in extensive research).

Section 4.3.1 discusses the approach I adopted for the reduction and display of my interview data. However, as will be discussed below, as the research progressed I realised that the realist evaluation method was not going to allow me to consider the issue of practice enhancement (research objective 4). The realist evaluation method used has the same focus on outcomes as more traditional evaluation methods and thus suffers from a similar weakness when seeking to make research informed practice enhancements. The outcomes focus may tell me which mechanisms have/ have not impacted on the employment outcome but not what needs to be done within the University experience to enhance employability further. Section 4.3.2 moves on to deal with issues of validity within a critical realist context. Chapters 5 and 6 will complete the Miles and Huberman (1994) approach by discussing the conclusions drawn from the research.

4.3.1 Data Reduction and Display

Miles and Huberman (1994) writing from an explicit critical realist basis, describe data reduction as "... the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (p. 10). The purpose being that it "...sharpens sorts, focuses and organises data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified" (p. 11). The specific 'intensive' research approach (Miller and Tsang, 2010) of semi-structured interviews I have adopted has been used by previous critical realist researchers notably Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Wand et al (2010). In both these cases the researchers carried out semi-structured interviews constructed around a previously defined social structure. There were also similarities in the manner in which the data reduction process was conducted with both making use of attitudinal statements which provided quasi-

quantitative data. Within my own research method the use of the Likert scale at the end of the interviews plays a similar role to the attitudinal scales used in this previous research. However the Likert scale in my research is not the main focus of the data reduction method adopted.

The main data reduction method adopted is based around the coding of the interview responses rather than the numerical Likert responses. This was chosen as a more appropriate method for a number of reasons. Although like Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Wand et al (2010) I was interested in the evaluation of the effectiveness of a programme of change I also had a wider interest in the impact of the broader social structure on the way in which the interviewees had constructed their employability. The critical realist conceptualisation of employability adopted for the research emphasises the “social and cultural experiences that frames their [graduate] self-perception” (Tomlinson, 2010, p.81). Thus I was also interested in the possible differences between the broader differential contextual factors relating to FG and NFG interviewees, not just the direct impact of the employability enhancements on gaining a graduate level job. Basing the data reduction on direct interview responses rather than translating this into a Likert-type scale provided a much richer consideration of the data. The other issue was to not only explore the effectiveness of the enhancements but to consider the validity of the underlying assumptions about the potential trigger mechanisms. Figure 4.6 identifies a set of enabling variables which are assumed to be the potential trigger mechanisms in my CMO configuration. However we have to consider the possibility that exploration of the data may reveal evidence of additional trigger mechanisms which have not been identified. In other words I may have ‘missing mechanisms’ (research objective 1b). The reducing of the interview data to a numerical Likert scale would have restricted the depth of analysis needed to address these issues.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe the coding of data as a process of decontextualisation and recontextualisation “... as a means of providing new contexts for viewing and analysing data” (p. 31). As a guide to undertaking the analysis of the interview data the approach recommended by Robson (2002, p.459), based on Miles and Huberman (1994), suggests the following sequence:

1. Codify
2. Add comments and reflections ('memos').
3. Identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, relationships etc
4. Elaborate a small set of generalisations which cover the consistencies in the data
5. Link these back to theories and concepts

Robson suggests that a sixth step may need to be added which is to return to step 1 if steps 3 to 5 prove impossible to do, in other words a need to re-codify the data if the original conceptualisation is not producing evidence of any underlying mechanisms. In analysing my data this process was largely followed, although step 2 tended to be done on an informal basis rather than systematically. Robson's sixth step was replaced by a more fundamental step of returning to the data, not because steps 3 to 5 could not take place but because steps 3 to 5 suggested new possibilities and interpretations which needed to be explored through the data.

The initial data reduction method adopted was to code the data based upon the enabling variables identified in figure 4.6. These variables became the 'start list' or 'bins' (Robson, 2002, p. 459) for the recontextualisation of the data which allowed for the evaluation of the impact of the programme of change based on M1 to M6. In addition two further 'bins' were used to capture the interviewees' perception of missing mechanisms. As suggested by step 3 in the Robson sequence these responses were then examined for similarities as a means of identifying any demi-regs which might be indicative of contingent causality. Further, differences were also looked for in the responses of the FG and NFG interviewees.

The primary coding of the data outlined above reflects the graduates own narratives of the perceived impact of the enhancements on their employability and, as discussed in 4.2.1, provides data on the empirical domain. The results of the exploration of the interview data from this perspective allowed me to address my initial practitioner concern of the impact of the programme of change as represented in research objective 1a. However in order to address the first research objective fully a further secondary coding was undertaken to capture data from interviewees in relation to wider issues around their engagement with the graduate labour market.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) make the point that the mechanistic coding of data is not analysis “Coding reflects our analytical ideas, but one should not confuse coding itself with the analytical work of developing conceptual schemes” (p. 27). Richards (2009) in a similar vein, discusses the idea of “taking off from the data ... thinking about themes, rather than merely noting the topic discussed” (p.104). The second stage of this initial data reduction process was therefore for me to move beyond the narrative content of the empirical data and ‘take off’ to explore issues which emerged through a deeper consideration of the interview data. Thus the secondary coding of the data focused more on their perceptions of the graduate labour market entrance in figure 4.6 rather than the direct impact of M1 – M6.

The process described in the previous paragraph allowed for an evaluation of the programme of change and ‘tests’ the hypothesised social structure. Although the focus is on an evaluation of outcomes of the programme of change, as would be the case for a statistical analysis, it is a realist evaluation. Any findings which emerge from the analysis will be based on demi-regs which arise from the interaction of the interviewees with the pre-existing ‘real’ social structure. The epistemology will be based on how the interviewees have socially constructed their reality in relation to the underlying social structures of the employability social system. This will provide a very different perspective from a statistical study where the emphasis would have been on identifying, and verifying, cause and effect based just on the observed outcomes. However, as with a positivist methodology, the ‘critical’ element is reflected in the fact there is a hypothesised underlying theory which may be contested by the research findings.

As discussed above the realist evaluation will allow for my initial practitioner need to be addressed. However the critical realist view of employability developed in section 2.3 is one based on individuals actively managing their employability through action and decisions in response to the employability social system. On this basis ontology is central to the research process with understanding coming from exploring the way graduates interpreted and responded to the employability social structure. From my management perspective if I am to make research-informed enhancements to the Faculty’s employability strategy then I need to understand what

lies behind some of the outcomes observed (research objective 4). My role is to provide the opportunities within the university experience of the employability social structure which have the potential to enhance a student's employability. From the critical realist perspective this understanding of potential trigger mechanisms comes from inside the system through the actions and decisions of the students and not from looking at outcomes.

The final phase of the research process was therefore to explore the data from the critical realist view of employability being related to how the graduates had actively managed and developed their employability. A similar "taking off from the data" method was adopted but this time looking at "...how they approach[ed] their employability and the world of work generally" (Tomlinson, 2010, p.81). For this part of my exploration of the data Tomlinson's ritualist/ careerist typography of student work orientation provided the underpinning theoretical framework. The interview responses were considered against the attributes Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 2007) describes as 'ritualist' and 'careerist'. As with the employability social structure the analysis also seeks to test and develop the original Tomlinson framework.

4.3.2 Validity of the findings

Issues of validity and reliability of findings are more usually associated with positivist quantitative methods of research, however there is a need for consideration of such issues in relation to my use of realist evaluation. Although the data collection for my research was through qualitative interviews the use of that data to possibly identify mechanisms which suggest contingent causality means that the issue of validity does need to be considered.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to validity as the "criteria of trustworthiness" (p.200). However having adopted a critical realist perspective for the research the notion of any 'trustworthiness' and 'truth' to be found within the research outcomes will only be relative to the context of the research and not absolute to all similar contexts. Nevertheless any findings coming out of the research still need to be "...well founded and sound" (Richards, 2009, p. 148). Robson highlights what he refers

to as three ‘threats to validity’ (Robson, 2002, p. 171): description, interpretation and theory

Description

Robson defines this as being caused by “... inaccuracy or incompleteness of data” (p. 171). To overcome this particular potential threat full transcripts of all the interviews are provided in appendix 3. This also helps with the issue of potential data loss. Any data reduction process inevitably results in data loss as not all the data from the interviews are coded and become part of the analysis. The provision of full transcripts of the interviews allows for the reader to verify the findings for themselves. As was also described above the analytical process followed was an iterative process with constant referring back to the data as possible findings emerged.

Interpretation

There are two main areas to consider in relation to interpretation of the data plus the closely related issue of researcher bias. Firstly there is the potential of “... imposing a framework or meaning on what is happening” (Robson, 2002, p. 171), which could have been a particular problem in this case due to the use of a hypothesised social structure to frame the research and the data collection tool. However as the social structure used was based on extensive prior research into employability, and was used as an inductive framework, this was potential issue was largely negated. However throughout the research process I was aware of potential problems caused by my being an insider researcher who would not only bring my own experiences and value set into the interview process but also, as I was largely responsible for the employability enhancements being analysed, into the interpretation of the results (see section 4.2.2). The issue of my interpretation of the data though is, as discussed in section 2.2, from a critical realist perspective part of the context of the research (Fleetwood, 2005; Lewis, 2009; Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011).

Finally, there is also the fact that the data being analysed has been partly created by me through “conversations with a purpose” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 101). As pointed out by King and Horrocks (2010) “... we constitute knowledge through conversation and social practice. So rather than knowledge being conveyed in

conversation, it is brought into being” (p.17). Thus as the interviewer in a two way conversation with the interviewee I am part of the means by which the data is brought into being. Awareness of the fact that I am an insider to the knowledge creation process means that there was a need to remain as neutral as possible in the interviews by not asking leading questions nor expressing opinions and imposing my values during the interview. As a further check on this the sequencing of questions in one of the later interviews was switched around (the interview with Frank). As summarised by Marshall and Rossman (2006) “The participants’ perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant’s views it (emic perspective), not at the researcher views it (etic perspective)” (p. 101).

Theory

Within the context of the current research Robson’s ‘theory’ threat is close to some of the issues in relation to the ‘interpretation’ threat, specifically the possibility of making the data fit the particular underlying theories. Thus the concern is that the theoretical concepts discussed in chapters 2 and 3, such as the concepts of employability, the research underpinning the social structure, and the theories around social and cultural capital, are not privileged in the analysis of the data to the exclusion of other possible theoretical approaches. Two comments can be offered in relation to this potential threat to validity. The analysis was conducted in relation to the theoretical concepts and constructs discussed and developed in chapters 2 and 3. The view was taken that if that some of these proved to be inadequate in helping to answer the research questions fully (as they indeed did) then this would be one of the findings from the research.

4.4 SUMMARY

As discussed in section 1.4, critical realism is a philosophical view of the world rather than a research methodology. What drives the research approach and method is the phenomenon under investigation. What is under investigation in my research is graduate employability. However before designing the research to address the research objectives we needed to establish what the phenomenon ‘employability’ actually means from a critical realist stance. This was established at the end of chapter 2 where I adopted a view of employability, based on Tomlinson (2010), as

being socially created through the individual's interaction with the employability social structure. For graduates this was reflected in how well 'positioned' they felt for developing and sustaining a graduate career.

Chapter 3 was concerned with the first stage of the research design in developing an employability social structure which defined the pre-existing real elements faced by the research participants. This current chapter has developed a method for exploring how my research participants interpreted and acted within this social structure in constructing the social reality relating to their employability. The main practice concern is the effectiveness of the programme of change introduced in 2006 and the Pawson and Tilley (1997) realist evaluation method has been adapted to allow me to investigate this. However, as discussed at various points in this chapter, focusing on outcomes as an evaluation does will not really allow for a wider consideration of practice enhancements which, as a senior manager within the Faculty responsible for employability, should be of equal concern (research objective 4). Therefore a wider ranging more inductive approach to the data was also used to try and surface any demi-regs within the data, particularly in relation to comparative differences between the FG and NFG graduates. The final aspect of the research design again arises from the critical realist view of employability used as the initiating phenomenon for the research. If we adopt a view of employability formed around the actions of the graduates then we need to consider the outcome also from the view of the graduates as active managers and developers of their employability.

What has been demonstrated in this chapter is that the critical realist approach has allowed me the flexibility to explore a number of related issues around employability which would perhaps not have been open to me if I'd adopted a positivist or relativist approach. This point will be returned to in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: A CRITICAL REALIST EXPLORATION OF THE EMPLOYABILITY SOCIAL STRUCTURE

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the interview data collected and has two main purposes. Firstly, using the method developed in section 4.1 to undertake a realist evaluation of the programme of change and hence address research objective 1 (section 1.4). Secondly, in line with research objective 3, to explore how the adoption of a critical realist perspective provides new insights into ‘employability’. This chapter therefore presents a critical realist exploration of the interview data as an example of how the approach can be used to enhance understanding of a specific area of educational practice. In line with the main aim of the research chapter 6 moves on to consider how the critical realist approach has led to some research informed improvements to practice and the wider possibilities offered by the approach to management practice in general.

However before beginning the exploration of the data it is worth reflecting on the Kempster and Parry (2011) summary of the purpose of critical realist research, initially discussed in section 1.2, and how this has helped shape the research approach taken. Kempster and Parry summarise the purpose of critical realist research in the following terms: “For critical realists the scientific project is to understand and explain phenomena. Reality is seen as a result of causal powers.” (Kempster and Parry, 2011, p.107). The phenomenon under investigation in this instance is employability, but employability as viewed from a critical realist perspective. For the reasons discussed in section 2.3 a critical realist definition of employability based on that offered by Tomlinson (2010) was adopted for the research. This view sees employability as a social process actively developed by individuals in response to both their interpretation of the graduate labour market and also their (perhaps unacknowledged) ‘social and cultural experiences’ (Tomlinson, 2010). The previous discussion of the literature (section 2.3) suggests that from a critical realist perspective employability is reflected not just in gaining a graduate job but also being able to sustain and develop a graduate career. Therefore the interview data details 10 graduates’ experiences of their interaction with the employability

social structure developed in chapter 3 and the impact this had on the development of their employability.

Within this broad critical realist approach, research objective 1 relates to exploring the impact of both a specific programme of change and also of the wider employability social structure, on enhancing the graduates' employability. Of particular practice concerns are the comparative experiences of FG and NFG graduates. As suggested by Kempster and Parry (2011) the social reality of the graduates' employability arises from their interpretation and interaction with the pre-existing 'structures, practices and conventions' (Bhaskar, 1998) of the employability social structure. The interpretation and actions taken by the graduates as they encountered the social structure reflect the causal impact of specific elements within the social structure. One of the main purposes of the analysis of the data is to see if there are any commonalities, or demi-regs (Lawson, 1998), in the graduates interaction with elements of the social structure. To this end the graduates' interaction with the programme of change is considered in section 5.2 and consideration of the wider context in section 5.3. As part of this discussion research objective 1b is addressed with consideration being given to whether any trigger mechanisms emerge from the interviews which were not included in my original CMO configuration (figure 4.6).

The realist evaluation presented in sections 5.2 and the following wider social structure discussion in section 5.3, essentially fulfil the management practice need element of the research. However the adoption of a critical realist perspective allows the analysis to move beyond the practice enhancement objectives in the evaluation. As discussed in section 1.2, for critical realists understanding specific phenomena rests not on just looking at outcomes, but on understanding how agents construct their social reality through interaction with the surrounding social structure. Therefore to understand 'employability' there is a need to adopt an epistemology which is based on how the interviewees have managed and developed their own employability in response to the pre-existing 'structure, practices and conventions' of the employability social structure. Section 5.4 therefore explores the data from this critical realist perspective of employability. Through this process new insights on 'employability' as a concept begin to emerge. Section 5.5 offers a fuller discussion of the critical realist approach and addresses directly research objective 3.

Section 5.1 begins the exploration of the data by introducing the interviewees and considers aspects of their biographical backgrounds which are relevant within the social structure of employability (figure 3.2).

SECTION 5.1 – THE INTERVIEWEES

This section explores the biographical background of the interviewees drawing principally on the responses made to areas 1 and 2 of the interview schedule, although the self-reflection at the conclusion of the interview also provided some valuable insights. Within the CMO configuration used for the realist evaluation (figure 4.6) the pre-University prior variables, which are part of the context of the evaluation, are being explored. In critical realists terms the prior variables are part of the pre-existing social structure within which the interviewees are embedded and will therefore influence the social reality they create in relation to their employability. However the ontological focus of critical realism lies in how agents interpret and act within the social structure rather than on the outcomes or the ‘social facts’ which make up the social system. Therefore the discussion below will focus on the actions and decisions taken by the interviewees rather than the nature of the ‘structure, practices and conventions’ of the prior variables.

5.1.1 The First Generation Graduates

Anna

Anna is 23 years old and from North Warwickshire. She was taught at home and did not attend secondary school. Her first encounter with the formal secondary education system was at age 15 when she attended her local Further Education College to take GCSEs. These were completed in a year and she moved onto A-levels at the same college. Her aim had always been to go to University (Anna, 36-37) and she gained the equivalent of 300 UCAS points. Anna initially went to a university in Wales to study linguistics. However she did not like the university and switched to business management at my university after one term, as a February starter. The choice of degree seems to have been a difficult decision:

“Hated English when I was taught at home but when I went to the college I had a really good English teacher, I had no intention at taking it at A-level but they said you’re really good at it you should take it at A-level and they

said you're still good at it you should consider doing a degree in it, [...]So my academic side was thinking 'do linguistics' – but it was the practical application that made me think 'Business' instead.” (Anna, 47-50)

The switch to Business Management also seems to have also been influenced by her Mother

“In terms of doing the business especially rather than the linguistics degree there was a bit of influence from my Mum sort of saying ‘well you are more likely to get a job with a business degree than you are with a linguistics degree’ which was a motivator.” (Anna, 71-72)

She graduated in 2010 with a first class degree in Business Management. Subsequently she was recruited by her University through internal advertisement as a graduate teaching assistant, a role she is still doing. She is currently taking an MSc in Logistics and a PG Cert in Education, both required as a condition of her post.

Anna presents herself as somebody who was strongly motivated to succeed, something she attributes to her home schooling

“It changed my motivation and changed the way I worked – it was a lot more self-motivated” (Anna, 34-35)

The impact of being home educated is returned to at the end of the interview where again she links this to her motivation

“That I could actually do something because of being taught at home it was very isolated, nobody necessarily to compare against. So being able to go to University was obviously good [...] but actually that I could achieve, quite highly, and have that motivation to keep going all the way through” (Anna, 220-222)

This determination to succeed is also shown through her continuing to work up to 30 hours a week through her time at University, including during her final year:

“I was still working 30 hours per week and doing my undergraduate degree and applying for graduate level jobs, it was a complete balancing act, with no social life for at least 6 months” (Anna, 93-94)

However despite this strong self-motivation she is still quite surprised by the post she eventually obtains on graduation:

“... I never thought I’d be able to do this kind of job, didn’t imagine it possible, so when the opportunity was there, it was brilliant.” (Anna, 85)

The contrast between Anna’s outward show of strong motivation but apparent lack of confidence in her prospects is a common trait amongst the FG interviewees and will be discussed in more detail in section 5.3.

Beth

Beth is 23 years old and was originally from Oxfordshire although she now lives in Leicester and works in Coventry. After completing GCSEs at school she went to her local Further Education College and completed a BTEC National Diploma in Business. She gained the equivalent of 320 UCAS points and entered the university on an academic scholarship. As Beth states

“I always wanted to go into business, not on my own, but that was where my interest was from a young age” (Beth, 67)

However to realise this aspiration she had not originally set out to follow the academic route of College followed by University, rather this happened due to not being able to find suitable work-related alternatives:

“It was only in my second year when I considered that I was doing quite well [...] it wasn’t until I couldn’t find a job that I wanted, I was pretty adamant that I wanted to go straight into a job like my parents...” (Beth, 55-57)

Beth’s reference to her family in this quote is revealing and perhaps shows her family context, and parents’ attitudes, as a key factor behind the way she describes some of her pre-University journey. When asked later in the interview about the impact of her family on gaining a graduate job she comments

“They’d have been happy if I’d wanted to pick up litter all day.(laughs) [...] They brought me up to know that you need a job you need to go and do these

things. So it was never about what they wanted it was go and do what you want, just get there”. (Beth, 192-194)

Beth graduated in 2009 with a 2:1 degree in Human Resource Management. Her current post is the only graduate post she has had since graduation and was gained through the company’s normal application and selection procedures. The job was the first, and only, one she applied for on graduation.

Claire

Claire is 24 years old and came originally from Leicestershire but now lives and works in Coventry. After GCSEs she began A-levels at school but was ill for much of the first year and therefore transferred to her local college the following year and started again on a BTEC National Diploma course in Media. She gained the equivalent of 320 UCAS points. Claire expresses a very instrumental attitude towards her eventual decision to go to University based around her being ‘very, very money orientated’:

“At the time when I was at school I didn’t really think about education [...] end of year 11 beginning of 6th form - that I realised that I actually need to go to University cause none of my family have gone and they don’t really have lots of money – I want to have lots of money, I’m very, very money orientated ...” (Claire, 51-52)

However the crucial point in her pre-University journey seems to have been at the end of her unhappy first year at 6th form college. She was struggling to make the adjustment from GCSEs to A-Levels and had been ill for a large part of the year (Claire, 12-14). At this point she contemplates leaving the academic route and either going to college to take an apprenticeship or getting a job. However she does eventually decide to go to college, with the aim of going on to University. Beth’s mother seems to have been key to her final decision:

“I don’t think my Mum would have let me (laughs). We had lots of conversations about it, and it was “... if I want to earn lots of money and have a good job – you need to further your education” [...] I did have a look at apprenticeships [...] you know, that kind of thing, there wasn’t really anything I wanted to do, that I could do.” (Claire, 22-25)

Although not referred to directly in relation to the above decisions her being dyslexic does seem to have had an impact, particularly in her lacking in confidence about being able to complete her A-levels. Claire makes two references to her dyslexia during the interview which leads support to this view:

“... and I’m dyslexic, so I found that doing more coursework worked for me rather than going into the exams ...” (Claire, 17)

“... being dyslexic. Defiantly – but the disabilities office are really, really good. Compared to being at college and school and 6th form they’re amazing
“ (Claire, 273)

Claire graduated in 2009 with a first in Marketing Management. She applied for three graduate jobs, the post she gained being her second interview. The job was at her home university but was gained through an external application process; however she had worked as a student ambassador so was known by her eventual employer. She has been promoted to a higher grade since working for the university. She has just started her professional CIM marketing qualifications.

Deepak

Deepak is 24 years old from North Coventry who still lives and works in Coventry. He completed his GCSEs and A-levels at the same school and gained the equivalent of 200 UCAS points. Deepak’s long-standing ambition was always to join the Police and this is referred to at various points in the interview (Deepak, 28-29; 56-57; 78-79; 247-249) something he still maintains is his aim. He only considered applying for University during his second year at 6th form and, again, he saw this as part of his long term ambition to join the police.

“... when I was at school wanted to join the Police that was my ultimate goal. I got to GCSEs and I thought ‘well I’m still going to join the Police when I finish my A-levels’ [...] I spoke to my year Head at 6th form about it and he said ‘Look, university is such a good experience; you can learn a lot from it’. So thought I’d put an application in and applied to YY uni for business management, just to see if I would get the place.” (Deepak, 19-21)

He goes on to expand on the influence of his police ambitions as being instrumental in the choice of degree

“I had a meeting with a senior Police officer and he said to me ‘we’ve got loads of graduates coming now who have got criminology’ and he said ‘that’s no good if you want to become a manager in the Police, the Police is being run like a business, so we need business type graduates’” (Deepak, 28-30)

The other interesting aspect to Deepak’s background is not just the support he gained from his immediate family in going to University but his perception that he became a role model amongst his extended family:

“I’m the first one to actually graduate in my family so [...] so a lot of my cousins have thought about university as an option and they never did before, [...] ‘Cause our family are very working class, so all my uncles, my Dad worked at Jag on the production line that’s all he’s done. And a lot of the family now see that University could be an option for them” (Deepak, 271-272)

For his parents going to university was seen

“... as a really prestigious thing to do [...], and to do really well was a really big thing. My Mum and Dad definitely gave me the support.” (Deepak, 275-276)

Deepak gained a first in Business Management in 2010 and has had to put his Police ambitions on hold as the next graduate intake will not be until 2013 at the earliest. He applied for a number of graduate trainee posts but eventually was taken on by a local building society which he had been working part-time for during his time at University. He currently works as customer relations co-ordinator but is due to take up a place in their graduate training scheme in the near future.

Ed

Ed is 28 years old and from Northamptonshire where he still lives. He originally left school after GCSEs and trained as chef at his local college. He worked in the catering industry in the UK, New Zealand and Australia for seven years before

deciding to go back into education and gained a place as a mature student on a Business Management degree. Entry was based on an interview and his extensive work experience. The reasons for his decision to come back home and take a degree are not really clearly expressed by Ed, the closest he comes is the following explanation

“A very good friend of mine was the manager and I turned round to him and said I’m not happy I’m just going to go, so I went fruit picking for 10 weeks got back to nature. I realised that I’d got a portfolio of skills but I hadn’t kind of – got into any kind of classification, I hadn’t got them under any kind of remit. I knew I could do a lot and that I’d achieved a lot by the time I was 24 but I kind of wanted to put it together.” (Ed, 64-67)

His reasons for taking Business Management are a little clearer and supported his intention of setting up his own business in the catering industry

“I’d looked at couple of courses. I wrote my UCAS application sat in a hostel at Rainbow beach in Australia and I’d met some events management graduates and with my knowledge of business and the industry I didn’t feel that they’ve left University with something that I would want [...] if I did generic business in terms of business management I’d then be able to apply it to anything that I did ...” (Ed, 76-79)

He graduated in 2010 with a first class degree. During his time at University he developed his own catering business on an ad hoc basis organising catering events for private and corporate clients.

Many of Ed’s responses are vague and make reference to contacts and deals relating to his business, plus the time he spent working abroad and the people he met prior to his degree course. Throughout the interview he shows a strong sense of his perceived business capabilities but it is difficult to substantiate the claims being made. Perhaps the most revealing part of the interview in this respect is when asked about whether he had applied for graduate training programmes to which he responds

“The reason I chose those companies because I know them, I’d done some hospitality for them and went for Jaguar, I’d done some things for them as well [...]

PC – Did you actually get past the first stage?

No, none of them. The problem I had was I think I was 27, yes I've got a degree, I got a first class but a 21 year old, maybe, with no experience was better than somebody who could challenge the status quo." (Ed, 113-118)

This exchange perhaps reveals more about Ed's actual capabilities rather than his perceived capabilities. His only reference to his family is a rather disparaging comment when asked about the use of contacts to build his business

"No family connections. My family are hopeless in terms of making a contribution to my work. I actually employed one of them once and would never do it again – my father helped me for a whole week and it was terrible." (Ed, 324-325)

Since graduating he has established his business as a limited company and is looking to develop the business on a more secure and sustainable footing. He refers to himself as a "hospitality and catering professional" (Ed, 51).

Frank

Frank is 25 years old and from Burnley in Lancashire. After school he went straight to his local college and completed an AVC double award in computing gaining about 200 UCAS points. He had always been set on going to University from his secondary school.

"Ever since I can remember I wanted to. I've never been someone who's not liked education. [...] I always wanted to get a good job." (Frank, 82-84)

Although business was an interest (Frank, 14-16) he decided to take a BA Business Computing course immediately after finishing his AVC. However after two years of Business Computing he began to question his choice of degree as the business content was not as significant as he had been lead to believe at the start of the course.

"There was nothing wrong with the Business Computing course but it just wasn't for me. I wanted to learn basically things like ecommerce, things like that, but it was more about actual computers and things, [...] but I wanted to

learn how they help business and how they bring things together in business”
(Frank, 60-62)

He decided to take a gap year and obtained a job as a customer services manager in a local company in East Lancashire. However after his year out he had encountered significant problems in re-joining his original course (Frank, 149-162) and even considered quitting University altogether. Eventually he managed to switch to BA Business Management for the final year and graduated with a 2:1 in 2009.

Through his pre-University journey, and his problems on his original degree course, his family have been supportive, as he says

“They’ve always embraced the fact that I wanted to try something and go somewhere different – kick me out of the house (laughs) – but they’ve always said that you should try ‘cause you won’t get the chance in 10 years time it’ll be a lot harder to study than it is now’. They supported me financially and emotionally, if you will, and yeah – they were a big help”
(Frank, 95-99)

Later in the interview he also makes reference to his father’s work which seems to have had an influence on his choice of career

“My father works on a company where logistics is huge – he sells oil and a penny either way on the transport costs, it’s a huge, huge cost. So it always interested me. The idea was to become something of a project manager which is not far what I’m off now.” (Frank, 175-178)

Frank applied for a lot of jobs plus attended some assessment centres before finally being offered the job he currently has via a recruitment agency. The company is a bed manufacturer and has recently taken over another UK-based firm to become one of the biggest in Europe. Since taking the job he has had many areas of responsibility on the logistics side of the business, particularly in relation to managing the transport delivery fleet, however he seems to relish the challenges presented

“For example on Friday I was doing the year’s budgets with the logistics and operations director of XX that was difficult but, it was good fun actually. Day-to-day I do a lot of resource management so I predict our sales figures I

can then work out how many vehicles we need, how many drivers we need in our different depots. I'm environment officer which is a nightmare! I can not stand it! I'm our communications person as well, I'm in charge of all our PDAs, our mobile phones" (Frank, 360-365)

Somewhat surprisingly he is the first graduate to be taken on by the company in their logistics operations department (Frank, 405-407).

Gary

Gary is 23 years old and from Gravesend in Kent where he attended Grammar School. He went straight from school to 6th form and on to University. At various points in the interview he implies that he feels that he seriously under-performed in his A-levels and this prevented him from going to a red-brick University, like his brother has done subsequently:

"... he did a lot better at A-level than I did, he went to YY which is obviously a red-brick university, he did Finance and Business and he got a first in that from YY. So he's got, like, a phenomenal degree from a phenomenal university." (Gary, 419-422)

He seems to lay the blame for this perceived under-achievement on being forced to do the wrong A-levels (Maths, Physics, IT and Economics) by his parents:

"The kind of A-levels that I picked weren't necessarily my choice in as much that my parents had a lot of involvement in my A-levels. Being the first born in the family I was the kind of test case with regards to A-levels and all that kind of stuff that my parents hadn't done 'cause they only did O-levels and stuff when they were around" (Gary, 29-32)

This issue of having his A-levels chosen for him is an area he returns to at various points in the interview (Gary 17- 25; 120-126; 135-137; 416-422) and is obviously a major concern for him. He makes it quite clear that the choice of degree subject was his own decision

"I didn't care after I got burnt at my A-levels, I put a sizable amount of blame on them [his parents] for my choice of A-levels and so I was like "I'll pick

my degree course now – completely devoid of your input here and I’m telling you what I’m doing and I’m going to do it”” (Gary, 99-100)

When asked about his motivation for going to University he initially talks about not being ready to start a career and being “... more than happy in education” (Gary, 73). However as he goes on to say the fact that he was at a Grammar school also had a significant impact:

“... because of my performance when I was in Primary School, my performance in my SATs tests, I went to a Grammar School and then from there the kind of assumption always was that you would go into Higher Education” (Gary, 66-67)

He graduated in 2009 with a first in Marketing Management and started work straight away as a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) manager for an international internet provider, a job he’d specifically targeted based on previous work experience. He has moved company once since starting work and also does private consultancy work.

5.1.2 The Non-First Generation Graduates

Rose

Rose is 24 years old and from South Warwickshire where she still lives. Her father, uncle and grandfather all went to University and completed degrees plus three cousins in the USA are currently at University. She completed her GCSEs and A-levels at school and gained the equivalent of 270 UCAS points. The unquestioned assumption throughout her school days had been that she would go to University:

“... we just didn’t really talk about it that much. I guess in my head I knew that was the direction I would end up going in and school was quite directional in making you make that choice [...] They were quite passionate about getting as many students there as possible.” (Rose, 54-57)

The choice of degree was her own with her parents happy to support her in taking whatever she felt happy with

“... it was never ‘I’m not sure that’s right for you I want you to do Maths or English’ it was more of ‘well if that’s what you enjoy then go for it’.” (Rose, 67-68)

She graduated in 2009 with a first in Business Management. She is employed as a Creative Marketing Executive at the corporate Headquarters of a national lingerie retailer. She did not apply for any graduate jobs whilst at University but began working for her current employer immediately on graduation in an admin role on the recommendation of a family friend:

“I started literally the first day after my last exam just part-time in the customer services department [...] Then after a few months of doing that they decided to make me permanent so they trained me up on the whole of the fitting service [...] Then after a few months of doing that I moved into the marketing department [...] and then I think July last year I managed to get the role I’m in now.” (Rose, 35-39)

As can be seen from the above quote Rose did not join the company in a graduate role but has quickly been promoted to her current post as a Creative Marketing Executive. She has no plans to take any further formal qualifications.

Steve

Steve is 25 and originally comes from Birmingham although he now lives in Worcester. His father has a degree in Engineering and his mother has an HND in Technical Drawing and Structural Engineering. He went straight from School to 6th form and took A-Levels in Maths, Physics, IT and Business; although he failed his Maths he still managed to gain 200 UCAS points. He feels that he under performed in his A-Levels and this has been a constraint on achieving his original aim of becoming a chartered accountant:

“Because I hadn’t got great A-level results when I was looking at doing all the Chartered Accountant exams they all look on your A-level results. They obviously want to know that you’ve got a 2:1 at degree level [...] got certain amount in your UCAS points you’ll pass the Chartered Accountants in, if not you won’t.” (Steve, 101-107)

He had been intent on pursuing accountancy as a career since secondary school and chose to do BA Business and Accounting as he was unable to gain a place on a BA Accountancy degree due to his A-level performance:

“Because I enjoy working with figures and I enjoyed the accounting from doing business studies at school [...] But I also enjoyed the business side and learning how businesses work etc so I thought ‘well instead of doing pure accounting it would be the best option to do a mixture of both’ and then at the end you got a mixed bag of skills rather than just one in accounting.”
(Steve, 59-62)

The assumption at school had always been that he would go on to University, which Steve does not appear to have questioned:

“I think it was because it was the natural progression, you were almost assumed you were going to University” (Steve, 48-49)

He also uses the same phrase ‘natural progression’ in relation to his parents’ expectations about going to University (Steve, 57). His parents have supported him before and during his time at university:

“Well they’ve always been supportive and they always given me ... they were willing to help. [...] They’ll support me in whatever I do.” (Steve, 270)

Steve also seemed to have been intent on gaining some relevant work experience, referring to an attempt before starting University (Steve, 52-53). He finally secured a place through his own efforts at the end of his second year in an accounting firm in Worcester and took a gap year between his second and final year. He achieved a 2:1 in his degree and now has a permanent post at his former placement employer and will move onto their trainee insolvency administrator programme next year.

Tim

Tim is 24 and originally from Kenilworth in Warwickshire although he now lives in Nantwich in Cheshire. His mother has a degree in English and Drama from XX and his father a teaching degree from YY. He went straight through school to 6th form and on to University. He was disappointed with his A-level results and UCAS points of 240:

“I got a B, a C and a D, which was a big let-down for me really. I was predicted ... well I didn’t drop below a B at GCSE, A*, As and Bs at GCSE” (Tim, 122-123)

During the interview he initially suggests that the reasons for his perceived under-performance were related to family problems, referring to his parents breaking-up (Tim, 98-99) and the death of his grandfather (Tim, 101). However he eventually suggests that maybe it was his own fault:

“... I don’t know, maybe it was my rebellious period. Throughout my GCSEs I’d been quite hard working and diligent and got my driving licence so I could go and drink and spend time with women and things like that, and my focus on my studies and my attendance petered out quite a lot.” (Tim, 102-103)

Tim originally followed in his father’s footsteps to YY to take a degree in Business Management. The assumption all through school was that University was the eventual goal, as Tim says:

“... it wasn’t a conscious decision. It was ... what was it called ... it evolved with my education: you do your GCSEs; you do your A-levels; and then you go to University.” (Tim, 201-202)

However Tim did actually consider other options but these were not pursued because of a lack of support from his parents:

“I quite fancied the idea of being an electrician, I was quite ... I went to a couple of presentations at colleges and things like that but I didn’t receive nearly as much, you know, positive support with that as I did with ... (PC – What from your parents?) ... yeah ... as I did when I mentioned University” (Tim, 155-157)

Tim did not take to YY and came home before the end of the first term. Commenting on the initial decision to go to YY Tim comments:

“It was a decision that was influenced heavily by what other people, I think, thought was best for me and it wasn’t till I got there and I realised it was all done in a bit of a whirlwind.

PC – So who was it that influencing you to do that?

A-levels teachers and my parents.” (Tim, 18-19)

He quickly found a job in a local warehouse of a German firm who make high value seats for the motor industry. He decided to restart his degree again as a part-time student at my University and was also at the same time put on the company's management training scheme. He completed two years as a part-time Business Management student before realising that he had to make a choice between carrying on with his ever more demanding job or devoting all his time to getting as good a degree as he could. This does not appear to have been an easy decision and he was torn between his manager's view that “‘University's just a perk, work comes first’.” (Tim, 64), and his father's view to “do it whilst you're young” (Tim, 123). Eventually he gave up his job and completed his degree as a full-time student:

“... I just hadn't got the decisions quite right the first time and by this stage I valued where a degree was going to get me because I'd done the jobs that I would probably have carried on doing if I hadn't got a degree” (Tim, 65-66)

Tim graduated in 2010 with a First in Business Management by which time he had already secured a graduate trainee post with a luxury motor company based in Crewe, one of two graduate trainee posts he was offered. He is looking to complete his professional qualifications and considering starting a Masters course.

Concluding comments

Some interesting commonalities beginning to emerge from the individual biographies presented above, appendix 2a provides a brief summary pen portrait of the interviewees. However these possible demi-regs will be considered in more detail in section 5.3 when the wider social context of the employability social structure is discussed.

5.2 THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME OF CHANGE

As discussed in chapter 4 the main purpose of introducing a programme of change into an established social structure is to bring about an improvement in programme effectiveness (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The basis of the Pawson and Tilley realist evaluation framework is the simple equation

OUTCOME = MECHANISM + CONTEXT

The DLHE data for the Faculty (appendix 5) shows that the outcome is a four year upward trend in positive destinations. However the original purpose for undertaking the evaluation was to assess the contribution of the employability enhancements to this improvement. Therefore the framework developed in section 4.1.1 (and summarised in figure 4.4) needs to be used to explore the effectiveness of the employability enhancements as a trigger mechanism in helping graduates achieve the graduate employment outcome. Or, put another way, whether the programme of change was effective in breaking into “... the existing chains of resources” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p. 75) to replace the previous approach to employability.

However the critical realist nature of the research means that the effectiveness of the programme of change is explored from the perspective of the graduates’ who have direct experience of it. If the individual graduate’s employability is the product of their interpretation and responses to the social structure of employability then the effectiveness of the programme of change needs to be seen for the part it played in this process. In critical realist terms the causal impact of the programme of change will be reflected by the contribution it has made to the graduates’ social construction of their employability (Kempster and Parry, 2011). In terms of the exploration of the interview data the employability impact will be reflected in an enhancement of the individual’s ““skills, understandings and personal attributes [to] be successful in their chosen occupations” (Yorke, 2004).

One of the key criticisms made in chapter 3 of previous work into employability was the failure to distinguish between context and mechanisms. The evaluation of the programme of change in this section focuses on decisions taken by graduates in relation to opportunities presented to them as part of their university experience. Therefore the primary focus is on a range of mechanisms. However previous research discussed in section 3.1 (Brennan and Shah, 2003; Purcell et al, 2005) suggests that NFG graduates may have a higher propensity to access employment enhancing opportunities. Therefore there is also a need to explore whether the effectiveness of the mechanisms in the programme of change appear to be dependent on this particular aspect of context. This is also important from a practice perspective as one the original factors behind the development of the employability

enhancements was to help mitigate the perceived additional graduate labour market barriers faced by FG students (section 4.1.2).

Therefore in exploring the impact of the programme of change represented by M1-M6 in figure 4.6 from a critical realist perspective, I am actually exploring three related issues in relation to the notion of ‘impact’. The first impact arises from the critical realist definition of employability as discussed above. The question to be addressed from this perspective is whether the graduates regarded each potential mechanism as having had an impact on the ongoing development of their employability. This, however, is not the same as the practitioner impact concern where the question to be asked relates directly to the impact of the mechanism on the graduate making a successful transition into a graduate job. Finally, again following on from the discussion above, there is the third issue of whether the NF/NFG context variable had any perceived effect on the comparative impact of the employability enhancements.

Section 5.2.1 presents an analysis of each of the mechanisms identified in figure 4.6 from the three impact perspectives discussed above: the impact on employability; the impact on graduate labour market entry; the impact of the FG/NFG contextual variable. To address these issues the interviewees’ responses to the direct questions relating to M0 to M6 (area 3 of the interview schedule) were decontextualised and recontextualised using the process outlined in section 4.3.1. To add clarity to the discussion a colour coded summary of the recontextualised data is presented for each of the variables providing a visual summary of the perceived impact of that variable on the interviewee.

Table 5.1 – Summary of impact

++	Strong impact identified on gaining graduate level job
+	Some impact on gaining graduate level job
(+)	Some impact on gaining graduate level job, but not realised until later
(-)	No impact on gaining graduate level job, but potential value recognised
-	No impact
	No information

The colour coding is a useful initial indication of the impact of each mechanism on both employability and the employment outcome. The “no impact on gaining graduate level job, but potential value recognised” (-) is a proxy for a mechanism which the graduate feels may have had an impact on their employability. Whereas the “Strong impact identified on gaining graduate level job ++ / Some impact on gaining graduate level job +” is an indicator of a mechanism which may have had a direct impact on the graduates successful transition into graduate employment.

The Likert Scale scores from the interviews are also shown with any apparent anomalies between the Likert score and the interview comments identified and commented on. The average Likert score for all interviewees is given at the top of each table, the average for the FG and NFG are provided in () under each section of interviewees. However given the relatively small sample the Likert scores are only used in a general way to confirm interview responses and provide a guide to the relative perceived importance of the variables in terms of impact. Appendix 4 presents summaries of the recontextualised interview data which resulted from the primary and secondary coding process as outlined in section 4.3.

Section 5.2.2 moves on to examine the data from the perspective of trying to see if the interviewees identified anything which might be regarded as a ‘missing mechanism’. Finally section 5.2.3 considers the programme of change from a more holistic perspective and draws some conclusions in relation to any demi-regis which might be evident in the data

5.2.1 Interviewee comments on the impact of the enabling variables

MO: Degree and degree class

The graduates’ degree and degree class are not actually part of the programme of change. However as established in chapter 3 a students’ degree class plays a central role as one of the key enabling variables in the employability social structure (Blasko, Brennan and Shah, 2003; Smetherham, 2006; Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009) to the extent that it can be regarded as a context free generative mechanism. The other issue in connection with this particular enabling variable is a conflation of context and mechanism that is difficult to separate out. As discussed in section 3.2 a student’s final degree outcome is likely to reflect both contextual

factors relating to a student's background and also behavioural factors relating to how they have responded to opportunities open to them whilst at University.

As expected table 5.2 shows that degree and degree class come out as having had the strongest impact on the interviewees' successful transition into the graduate labour market. This is not surprising as eight of the ten interviewees went straight into graduate level jobs, for which the degree was an essential pre-requisite. Of these eight, three (Anna, Beth and Steve) are in jobs where the degree subject was also a pre-requisite for the job. For Ed, who runs his own business, the original choice of degree seems to have been determined by his perception of what he needed to develop and support his aim of setting up his business (Ed, 63-67; 145-155).

Table 5.2 Degree and Degree Class

Interviewee	Degree	Class	Impact of degree	Impact of Class	Likert - Degree	Likert - Class
FG					3.7	3
Anna	Business Mgt	1st	++		4	4
Beth	HRM	2:1	++		4	4
Claire	Marketing Mgt	1st	(+)	+	3	3
Deepak	Business Mgt	1st	++	+	4	4
Ed	Business Mgt	1st	++		4	2
Frank	Business Mgt	2:1	++		4	3
Gary	Marketing Mgt	2:1	+	++	3	3
NFG					(3.7)	(3.3)
Rose	Business Mgt	1st	+	-	4	4
Steve	Business and Acc	2:1	++	(-)	4	1
Tim	Business Mgt	1st	+	++	3	2
					(3.7)	(2.3)

Rose was the only one of the 10 interviewees who has worked her way up within the company which she joined directly after graduation in a non-graduate capacity. However she seems to be unsure whether having a degree has had any impact on her subsequent rapid progress up the company hierarchy:

“PC - Do you think that having a business management degree was in your favour when you were going for these jobs further up the company, was that a factor?

I don't think it was at the entry level when I came in – whether it has in the other ones? I hope it's helped but I've never had the feedback 'oh we're really glad that you've got a degree' I just don't know.

PC – And the fact that you've got a first hasn't made any difference

No one's mentioned anything, no” (Rose, 108-113)

The Likert score of 4 which she gives for both the impact of the degree and degree class seems to be at odds with this though. The explanation perhaps lies in her comments that

“I do think it's been helpful, definitely, because it's given me a really wide eye on how businesses work and how each department gels ...” (Rose, 105-107).

Therefore Rose seems to regard her degree as having enhanced her employability even if it was not an initial enabling factor in her original post-graduation job.

What appears to be less obvious to the graduates is the impact of their degree being a good degree. Rose, for example, places a more indirect and personal interpretation on the question when giving a 4 as the Likert score:

“I'd say 4, but that's more for my benefit because that gave me confidence that I knew I was good” (Rose, 217).

This comment concerning the sense of personal benefit to having a good degree is actually echoed by a number of other interviewees:

“Something to be proud of - I didn't know that!” (laughs) (Deepak, 142);

“Maybe personally, but professionally” (Ed, 380);

“I'd say yes, in the respect of it looks good” (Gary, 147);

“So it wasn't an essential but obviously it looks better” (Steve, 125).

Previous research, discussed in chapter 3 (Mason et al, 2003; Blasko et al, 2002; Smetherham, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), suggests that having a good degree is a potential generative mechanism. However we cannot say whether this is the case for these graduates, but what we can say is that if the good degree was a causal factor then it is a relationship which the interviewees appear to be unclear about. As such it may be an unacknowledged aspect of the social structure relating to employment practices, which echoes other unacknowledged aspects noted by previous research (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007).

M1: The add+vantage modules

Table 5.3 summarises the impact of the add+vantage modules mechanism within the programme of change.

Table 5.3 Indirect Enabling variable - Add+vantage modules

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
FG			2.5
Anna	Yes, but only level 3	+	3
Beth	No impact	-	1
Claire	Yes, lead directly to job	++	4
Deepak	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
Ed	Used work experience in friend's business	(-)	3
Frank	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
Gary	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	2
NFG			(2.7)
Rose	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
Steve	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	2
Tim	No impact	-	1
			(2.0)

Of the 10 interviewees only Claire said that her add+vantage modules had a high impact on her eventual graduate job

“The second year one I did the student ambassador one, that's a really, really good scheme and got me to where I am now, it gave me the skills, it gave me

the opportunity to work in lots of different areas, you know, that was brilliant.” (Claire, 135-137)

Beth and Tim both claim their add+vantage modules had no impact. For Anna the add+vantage time management module appears to have helped her in a personal capacity to cope with the demands of her course, personal life and making job applications:

“ ... but the project management one was brilliant[...] I was working at the same time doing quite a few hours, and doing the degree, I was already doing some of that time management, the organisation, self motivation from being taught at home but that really did lay it out in one 10 credit module “ (Anna, 119-125).

However as can be seen the other six interviewees all perceive some benefit from their add+vantage modules, even though for most of them the realisation comes after they start work. Thus, for example, Deepak comments that:

“I couldn’t see the link before, I don’t think many people could, but looking back when you’re actually in employment I think you actually have one” (151-152)

Similarly Frank comments that:

“... I did ‘Managing Change’ which was a little far out at times but gave me a different perspective and the open mindedness is what’s helped me do the job I’m doing.” (211-212).

Gary (167-173), Rose (115-121) and Steve (130-133) all make similar comments of the usefulness of their add+vantage modules, but only once in work rather than as a mechanism to help gain work.

Therefore in relation to the three aspects of impact the choices made over the add+vantage modules seem to have had, for the majority of graduates, some causal impact in developing their employability, even though this did not become apparent until they were in employment. However, with the exception of Claire, the add+vantage modules appear to have had no direct impact on their successful

transition into the graduate labour market. In relation to the impact of context there is no evidence of any comparative differences between FG and NFG graduates.

The other point to note in relation to the add+vantage modules is that although all of the interviewees had jobs at some point during their time at University only two (Claire and Ed) took the opportunity of the add+vantage work experience modules to gain academic credit. However both seem to imply that the opportunity to gain academic credit for the work experience was not the motivating factor, both would have undertaken the work experience anyway (Claire, 146; Ed, 173-176)

M2: The Employability Learning Package (ELP)

The question in relation to the impact of ELP provoked in most interviewees an immediate negative response and, in a couple of cases, a laugh. Also a number were initially reluctant to answer the question and had to be prompted. The response of Claire sums up this negative attitude towards ELP shown by most of the interviewees:

“To be completely honest it was a waste of time. The concept of it you could see why it could be good, but when we were actually doing it I wouldn’t say that it actually helped us with careers, it just sort of hindered us because we were trying to concentrate on other coursework and we were having to try and do this piece of work that didn’t count towards any module” (Claire, 151-153)

However, as can be seen in table 5.4 two interviewees gave more positive responses and did see some benefit in trying to get students to think about their options after University:

“It was helpful. It introduces us to new software, also being able to compare jobs [...] I think you get so embroiled with doing work that you forget that you’ve got to be doing job search – doing ELP bits allowed that to happen.” (Deeak, 189-192)

“My father is a Director [...] and he’s saying ‘This is what you need, this is what you need’. ELP advanced it, but it re-enforced it as well – ‘Yeah, he

was right, I should have listened to him’ but there was other things as well that did help” (Frank, 214-221)

Table 5.4 Indirect Enabling variable - Employability Learning Package (ELP)

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
FG			1.4
Anna	No – generic and no value seen. Something you did just to get done	-	1
Beth	No. Question provoked a laugh. Done elsewhere	-	1
Claire	Question provoked a laugh. Concept was good but not the way it was presented. Waste of time.	(-)	1
Deepak	Good way of getting you to think about jobs	+	3
Ed	Paid no attention to, did to get it out of the way	-	1
Frank	Did not think much about it at the time, but realises now that it was of use	(+)	3
Gary	Could not really recall ELP	-	1
NFG			(1.6)
Rose	No. Question provoked a laugh.	-	1
Steve	No. Waste of time	-	1
Tim	Struggled to recall ELP	-	1
			(1)

However the conclusion appears to be that for most of the interviewees ELP had little impact on either the graduates’ development of their employability or their employment outcome. There are no comparative FG/NFG differences in responses.

M3: The Career Development Modules

As can be seen from table 5.5 there were no direct negative associations with the career development modules. All of the interviewees acknowledge that they had an impact in terms of the enhancement of their employability and/or their employment outcome. However, as with the add+vantage modules, they do not realise the potential impact whilst at University. Indeed Tim’s response reveals that most students simply did not see the point of the modules

“...the attendance and things like that wasn’t great. I don’t know. I don’t want to sound unprofessional; I think people might see these as a nag, doing things

like that. Something they have to turn up to rather than something that is of benefit” (Tim, 285-287)

Table 5.5 Indirect Enabling variable - Career Development Modules

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
FG			2.6
Anna	Yes	++	4
Beth	Content helpful and lead to work experience opportunity	(+)	2
Claire	Yes – but did not realise it at the time	(+)	2
Deepak	No, but admits that if he’d taken more notice then it would have been helpful	(-)	2
Ed	Saw the value for other people	(-)	3
Frank	Good preparation, but did not realise at the time	(+)	4
Gary	Saw the value of them, but could not remember them	(-)	2
NFG			(2.7)
Rose	Not sure, but indentified some value	(+)	3-4
Steve	Course did not include career development modules	-	2
Tim	Struggled to remember them, but could be very good	(-)	1
			(2.2)

The response from Beth in relation to these modules is also indicative of the unacknowledged impact that the modules may have had on her graduate job. Although she is fairly dismissive of the career development modules when asked the question directly, it does emerge later during the interview that a key work experience that helped her with her final job came about through her final year career development module:

“YY had somebody come in to speak to us, the whole class, and she left her email address if they wanted to ask any questions and she said that she’d had to make her two admin people redundant so I sort of went ‘Oh OK! Can I come and do your admin. But I definitely feel that that massively helped. It also prepared me for what was to come for being in an office situation if not full on because it was only one full day a week so get a nice transition and not like arghh!!” (Beth, 168-175).

This general point about the unacknowledged impact of the career developments is further strengthened by Steve. As discussed in section 4.2.3 Steve was on a course where there were no career development modules. However his response to the question concerning what he felt was missing from his course is very revealing

” Speaking to friends at different Unis’ they always had modules on CV writing and they always used to moan about it, but the fact that you’ve got a module on careers, talking about where you can go with your career, CV writing, cover letter writing, applying for jobs, that kind of thing. Yeah everyone’s going to find it boring but it’s something actually real and quite useful.” (Steve, 249-252).

In other words he may have liked something similar to the career development modules. In relation to the impact of the FG/NFG context variable again there is no evidence of any comparative differences between the interviewee responses.

It is worth reflecting further on the responses to this question as they do highlight one of the aspects of using a critical realists approach to interviews discussed in section 4.3. As outlined in section 4.2 the interview schedule was structured around my practitioner needs relating to gaining a better understanding of the impact of the employability social structure. In Pawson and Tilley’s terms the interview schedule and subsequent interviews are ‘theory-driven’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). However the responses to questions in relation to the career development modules also highlights how the ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2006) approach to knowledge creation is a two way process (King and Horrocks, 2010). Comments from Claire and Rose, which reflect a more generally held view, serve to illustrate the point being made:

“At the time I wasn’t quite sure why they were helpful, but looking back I can understand it now. I think the whole point is that I can understand that this is all really important but it’s the way it’s sold to you at the time” (Claire, 167-169)

“(pause) I think they were. Because I wouldn’t have had my linkedin network if I hadn’t have done it in Uni ‘cause I wouldn’t have known anything about

it. My CVs wouldn't be probably as up to scratch as they are and having learnt them, I did mine with XX," (Rose, 129-131).

What emerges from these responses is that neither Claire nor Rose had considered the impact that the career development modules may have had on both their employability and employment outcome until asked to reflect on this as part of the research interview. Thus through engaging with the interview process they were able to surface a new self awareness in relation to the development of their employability. This recognition of aspects of their employability not previously considered is also emerges in other areas of the interview responses and highlights the idea that a critical realist interview is a shared exchange of ideas and perceptions which can be beneficial to both parties.

M4: The University careers service

As can be seen clearly from table 5.6 the careers service aspect of the employability enhancements produced an almost unanimous negative response, apart from Tim who gave a completely opposite positive response. Eight of the nine interviewees who gave a negative response said that they had had limited or no contact with the careers service whilst at university. All the interviewees were probed further as to why this was the case. What emerged was a feeling that the careers service was inaccessible and remote, for example Beth comments:

"... I didn't feel that it was very accessible to go and speak to people and it just didn't hit my radar" (132-133)

This is a feeling shared by Anna;

"... obviously if you've got a central one it's not specific to your degrees it's not the experience" (Anna, 156).

From a practitioner point of view Claire's response regarding the careers service is particularly worrying:

"I think I went and saw them once actually. We had a presentation from someone and then they said 'oh, your dyslexic you will not get a job in any of

the blue chip companies, you're best to work in the councils because they're more helpful to people with disabilities' and I was like 'Oh, OK'[...] That's why I've never used careers I think because I've had negative opinions of them all the way through because I get feedback like that." (Claire, 177-184)

Table 5.6 Indirect Enabling variable – the University Careers Service

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
NFG			1.4
Anna	No, because the career modules were so good	-	1
Beth	Never used them	-	1
Claire	Sought help but has a bad experience and never used them again	-	1
Deepak		-	1
Ed	No contact with them	-	1
Frank	Wanted to get the job himself	-	2
Gary	Was not aware of what was available	-	1
FG			(1.1)
Rose	Not used	-	1
Steve	Did not know about them	-	1
Tim	Seen as a major impact	++	4
			(2)

Therefore what seems to be emerging is that for nine of the interviewees the enhanced university careers service had little impact on both employability and their successful transition into graduate employment. If these experiences are typical of students in general then the reasons given by interviewees perhaps offers some tentative explanation for the issue noted by Purcell et al (2005) that only 40% of their sample who used university careers services' found it useful. However this would require further research in different CMO configurations.

There is however one very revealing exception to the wholly negative response to the impact of the careers service. Tim's comments in relation to the career's service are in stark contrast to Claire's :

“She [a careers advisor] sat down with me and we went through... we did a lot of work on my CV and we did a lot of work on my interview questions, techniques and things like that. That was unbelievably good.

PC – That was a major impact

Major.” (Tim, 272 – 280)

From Tim’s perspective therefore the careers service was the key enabling variable in achieving his graduate employment outcome.

The conclusion therefore is that for most of the interviewees the careers service was something quite remote from their everyday experiences as a student, even Tim comments:

“... unless students actually have made the conscious decision to do that I think it will probably always be seen as something that’s a nag” (Tim, 279-280).

From a practice perspective the findings in relation to the lack of impact of the careers services are a major concern. The response from Tim shows that this mechanism has the potential to be a strong enabling variable but the problem is how to encourage students to take advantage of the service. In critical realist terms the careers service is not a part of the employability social structure which played a role in the majority of the graduate’s social creation of their employability. This is an area which will be returned to in chapter 6 as it has wider practice implications in relation to the difference between ‘employment skills’ and ‘employability skills’.

There is evidence from the previous research findings of both Purcell et al (2005) and Brennan and Shah (2003) that the FG/NFG context may be a factor in relation to the impact of the careers service. Generally this previous research suggests that those who are “‘advantaged’ in employability terms” (Brennan and Shah, 2003) are more likely to take advantage of institutional opportunities to enhance employability. However given that NFG Rose was unsure whether she’d used the service or not and NFG Steve was not even aware of its existence, the issue in the context of this research seems to be one of visibility, accessibility and relevance rather than anything related to the graduates social and demographic background.

M5: Course-based employability skills

The summary of the responses in table 5.7 shows that this mechanism had an impact on all interviewees either as an enabling variable in obtaining a graduate job and/or on their employability

Table 5.7 - Indirect Enabling variable - Course-based employability skills

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact
NFG		
Anna	Useful in the job, built up confidence	(-)
Beth	Question not asked	
Claire	Presentation as part of interview, other skills useful	++
Deepak	Links directly to job	++
Ed	Has used the skills as part of his work	(-)
Frank	Gave them confidence	++
Gary	Useful in the job	(-)
FG		
Rose	Presentation skills important in interview	++
Steve	Useful in the job, built up confidence	(-)
Tim	Useful in job	(-)

Looking at the data closely reveals two clear strands in the responses from the interviewees'. Claire (211-212), Deepak (206-209), Frank (262-266) and Rose (162-164) indicate that they had an impact on their successful transition into a graduate job. Rose in particular makes a direct link to her job market success

“Like your presentation you use that in your interview, it’s building a kind of persona you may not necessarily use every day but when you go into an interview situation you have to step up and you have to really present yourself as being the best, so having a lot of practice of that throughout Uni has definitely helped.” (Rose, 162-164).

Frank links the experience at university of practising these skills as being a factor in building his personal confidence:

“In that last year I became a lot more confident than I was in the first two years..., or a group was put together, in a couple of modules, made some good friends out of it but it definitely gave me leadership qualities, it gave me confidence to know I can suggest things without being shot down. It helped a lot ‘cause I’m not shy anymore,” (Frank, 262-266)

The second strand of responses from all the other interviewees is the view that the employability skills embedded in their courses, whilst not having direct employment impact, have enhanced their employability. Consider the responses from Gary and Tim for example when asked about the impact of the softer employability skills found in their course:

“(Pause) Yeah I think so. I think it was more kind of an expansion of what I got at school. [...] I knew how to put together an impactful presentation, I knew how to give a sales pitch, I knew how to ... like the kind of fundamentals of business.” (Gary, 226 229)

“Things like that were invaluable, [...] in your seminars, having to prepare coursework and learn to motivate other people in a group that weren’t necessarily motivated. Yeah, I think ... and independence as well, you’re given a lot of independence and responsibilities put on your shoulders, you know, you get out what you put in, and it’s the same with the job really so ... I think so.” (Tim, 331-334).

However again for Anna and Steve the same point noted above of the role of the employability skills in building personal confidence also emerges quite strongly:

“.... because I came in from being taught at home I was quite nervous, quite shy, and wouldn’t have stood up in front of 5 people when I came to University and I could see that building year on year, how much more confident I was getting on with presentations, so I could certainly see that one.” (Anna 190-193)

“I’m not very good at presentations, I never will be, but it’s that bit of confidence of standing up in front of the class. You don’t have a choice you’ve got to do it to pass your module. So you’re almost forced to do it but

that makes you want to do it and that makes you slightly better” (Steve, 184-185)

The common theme of confidence building in relation to the embedded employability skills is an interesting outcome. As discussed in section 4.1.2 one of the motivations behind the employability enhancement from the Faculty perspective was the feeling that our FG students had low aspirations and lacked self confidence. The embedded employability skills were seen as part of the ‘self’ element in the USEM framework (Yorke and Knight, 2004) around which the programme of change was built. The responses discussed above suggest that for these interviewees they had the desired effect. However the impact has not been confined to FG graduates, the NFG graduates make similar comments in relation to confidence building.

M6: Relevant work experience

In terms of employment impact the enabling variable of work experience whilst at University is the one which emerges the strongest with only Anna not making some reference to it having had an impact on the final post-graduation job. For Claire, Deepak, Ed and Steve their work experience whilst at University lead directly to their post-graduation job, whilst for Frank there was an indirect link. For the other four interviewees, although the work experience did not lead directly to a post-graduation job, it was seen as a significant factor:

“Just my placement I’d say that that massively helped and think it would help anybody who could get a part-time job in admin or anything like that, anything that gives them something extra” (Beth, 200-201)

“PC – Did you use those experiences when you were applying for these particular jobs – did you draw on them?

Yeah partly, especially the ambulance...” (Rose, 152-153)

“I had the bit of relevant experience at a couple of places already so that looked good. Eventually it must have been my fourth actual company I was interviewing with, I got offered the job at YY and I took it.” (Gary, 134-136)

“But WW gave a really good presentation and I stuck around and spoken to him afterwards [...] I managed to organise a week’s work up at Littlewoods during reading week of my second to last year, which was something else to put on my CV as a bit of purchasing experience.” (Tim, 309-311).

The importance attached by the interviewees in relation to work experience is further reflected in responses to the question concerning what advice they would give to students preparing to enter the labour market. Five of the interviewees (Anna, 211-121; Beth, 165-166; Claire, 256; Gary, 298-299; Tim, 375) focus on the importance of final year students having some work experience. Tim’s response is typical in emphasising the importance of any relevant work

“Apply early. Gain as much work experience as you possibly can, even if it’s just a week somewhere that you can build on and say what you learnt from it and what you’ve identified, and what you like about it, and how you think that could fit into the role that you’re applying for.” (Tim, 375-377)

As discussed in section 3.3 Holmes (2001) attributes work experience as being a key element in developing a students’ graduate identity. For the interviewees work experience is clearly seen as a key aspect of their employability. However in previous research (Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005; BIS 2011(b)) ‘work experience’ was equated with the traditional year long sandwich placement but for my interviewees any work experience, even only one week (see Tim (377) quote above), is seen as having a potential employment impact.

Table 5.8 – Indirect Enabling variable - Relevant work experience whilst at University

Interviewee		How obtained	Strength of Impact
NFG			
Anna	Continued with pre-University jobs in retail and Health care	Not clear	(-)
Beth	Obtained a voluntary WE in her final year	Contacted by interviewee after module presentation	++
Claire	Worked as a student ambassador	Interviewee applied	++
Deepak	Worked PT for post-graduation employer	Interviewee applied	++
Ed	Developed his own business whilst a student	Lead by interviewee	
Frank	Gap year and worked FT	Interviewee application	+
Gary	Summer placement plus worked during final year 3 days a week	Interviewee application	++
FG			
Rose	Worked at ambulance service and behind a bar	Both obtained through personal contacts	+
Steve	Placement year plus worked as a receptionist in the EPU	Interviewee application	++
Tim	Returned to one of his pre-University employers on a PT basis. Week WE in final year	Not clear – long-standing contact with the employer Contact from course presentation	+

Finally, as with all the other mechanism within the programme of change, there appears to be no FG/NFG context dependency in terms of impact.

5.2.2 The Identification of any Missing Mechanisms

As discussed in section 4.2.1 one of the advantages of a realist interview method of data collection is the opportunity to ‘test’ the robustness of the employability social structure as an “organising framework” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). As discussed in section 4.1.2 the realist interview is a two way “conversation with a purpose”

(Marshall and Rossman, 2006) which is ‘theory driven’ not ‘data driven’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Part of the evaluative process is to assess whether the social structure identified in chapter 3 actually captures the “structures, practices and conventions” (Bhaskar, 1998) associated with employability (and relates therefore research objective 1b). In effect the question to be asked is whether the generic social structure presented in figure 3.2, and the more closely defined CMO configuration developed in section 4.1.1 (summarised in figure 4.6), proved to be an adequate basis on which to build the research.

As was discussed in chapter 3 from a critical realist perspective one of the weaknesses of the previous research into employability was the conflation of context and mechanisms. In section 4.1.1 I identified the need to address this conflation of context and mechanisms as being central to the design of my realist evaluation. In my formulation of the CMO configuration used for the evaluation (figure 4.6) I made the distinction between prior variables (pre-university factors) and enabling variables (factors within the University experience), with the outcome being a graduate job. As the focus of the evaluation was on the impact of aspects of the University experience the prior variables were defined as part of the pre-existing social structure. These therefore represent the results of interviewees’ interactions with the social system prior to their University experience. In terms of the research design the prior variables are therefore part of the context. The focus of the evaluation was on the employability enhancements defined as mechanisms M0 to M6 in figure 4.6. However the possibility remains that there may be other enabling variables within the University experience which have not been included in the CMO configuration used for the research. In other words there may be trigger mechanisms which had an impact on the graduates’ job outcome but have been missed out of my original CMO configuration.

During the interviews one additional significant employment impact factor did in fact emerge. Six of the interviewees make direct reference to the impact of individual academic members of staff on their final successful transition into a graduate job. Several interviewees make reference to the importance of their relationship with their course tutor (who would take on the role of personal tutor)

“I think the biggest thing has been the support from staff at the university XX (*course tutor*) has been fantastic, she’s given me the motivation[...] a lot of support and guidance.” (Deepak, 195-196)

“Building a relationship with them and bugging XX (*course tutor*) to death by knocking on her door all the time allowed me much more access to the people that mattered than if I hadn’t done so, definitely” (Tim, 420-421)

“... to be honest I think that the fact that we have personal tutors, I know that not all course have that, I didn’t realise that at the time ... but the fact that we had that, that was really good and I had XX and YY and people like that.” (Claire, 195-196)

However Claire goes on to say

“The marketing lecturers were really, really supportive and I felt that they really, really looked after you and that for me made my degree and helped me to get to where I am now because they really pushed me right at the end to get that first.” (Claire, 196-198)

Both Ed and Steve also make reference to the impact of staff who were not actually their personal tutors

“... XX my [entrepreneurship module] tutor did a really good job at convincing me that I was this person with these characteristics and I think that I just sort of accepted the fact that erm I was different if you like and that’s the way it was going to go.” (Ed, 125-126)

“ In a sense some the lecturers, like XX (Dept employability tutor named). It just helped because you could always go and have a chat to them and they talked to you about real life situations and how it was ...” (Steve, 167-169)

What comes across strongly from these comments is the importance that the graduates’ attached to having a member of academic staff they feel they can talk to, not necessarily directly in relation to careers advice (with the exception of Steve) but more in a supportive capacity. This is particularly the case for Beth

“It was that you had that point of contact, you had somebody you could talk to whereas I thought that the whole time at Uni you were very segregated, you couldn’t speak to anybody you know ‘I’m going to see you three times and that’s it’” (Beth, 115-118)

This leads to a broader issue which will be returned to in section 5.3 as differences also begin to emerge between how the FG and NFG graduates used these relationships with tutors.

Interestingly the importance of staff whilst at University in impacting on the employment outcome is actually echoed in comments made by interviewees in relation to their earlier pre-university educational experiences. Several of the interviewees make reference to the importance of their relationships with teachers at school/ college:

“... and had a really good teachers at school who I have a really good relationship with – I always enjoyed going to their lessons and if ever I had free time I’d spend it in their classroom working hardest on my coursework “ (Rose, 65-66)

“One of my closest mates, closest friend, was my form tutor at school. I went on to work with Alan in careers service, sorry the youth service, we worked together. When I was at school he was very good as a mentor and my year 10 and 11 tutor” (Ed, 402-403)

”...taught by the same person as the business studies teacher, who I got on really well with” (Tim, 165)

“I did business studies at GCSE and really got along with my business studies teacher” (Beth, 63)

Indeed for Anna and Deepak the decision to go to University seems to have been partly due to the direct influence of their teachers (see earlier quotes in section 5.2 for Anna 47-50 and Deepak 21-22).

Generally the finding of the potential importance of tutors (both as a prior and an enabling variable) as a missing mechanism in my original CMO configuration

supports the suggestions made in this respect in both the CHERI and igraduate reports (Brennan and Shah, 2003; BIS, 2011b) discussed in chapter 3.

5.2.3 Evaluation of the impact of the programme of change

I am now in a position to address my first research objective - was the programme of change introduced in 2006 instrumental in the subsequent year-on-year improvement in the DLHE outcome? In terms of the realist evaluation framework discussed in section 4.1.1 did the programme of change act as a trigger mechanism to enable the regularity of enhanced employability to fire more often (figure 4.2)? However in evaluating the programme of change as a whole there is also a need to be aware of the three perspectives on the meaning of 'impact' outlined in the introduction to the current section: the impact on employability; the impact on the employment outcome; the impact of the FG/NFG context variable.

From the discussion in section 5.2.1 of the grouped narrative responses to area 3 of the interview schedule, two potential mechanisms emerge from the data as having had a strong employment impact: the degree and work experience. This finding reflects evidence from other research contexts (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000; Mason, Williams, Cranmer and Guille, 2003; Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003; HEFCE, 2001; Smetherham, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton, 2005). In critical realist terms this suggests that these two enabling variables are generative mechanisms providing contingent causality in the context-free deep domain within the social structure of employability (Fleetwood, 2005; Al-Moudi and Willmott, 2011 see also the discussion in section 3.2). What also tentatively emerged from my research data as an additional potential demi-reg is the influence of tutors on the successful employment outcome. However although these three mechanisms may be acting as triggers for the employment outcome none of them formed part of the programme of change of employability enhancements introduced in 2006. Although providing greater support for work experience was part of the programme of change the interviewees seems to have undertaken work experience in response to an identified need to enhance their employability rather than as a result of the employability enhancements put in place (see section 5.2.1).

In relation to the programme of change the interview data provides case studies of the impact this had on ten graduates on both their employment outcome and the wider development of their employability. It is clear that two aspects of the programme of change, ELP and the careers service, made little perceived impact on both employment and employability. There is therefore a *demi-reg* evident in the responses, but it is neutral in terms of causality. Thus although the issues raised in section 5.2.1 in relation to these mechanisms have practice relevance, they have to be discounted as trigger mechanisms. The discussion in section 5.2.1 does however indicate that the career development modules (M3) did appear to have some impact on the employment outcome.

What also emerges from section 5.2.1 is that the programme of change has had a greater impact on the interviewee's on-going employability rather than an immediate impact on a successful employment outcome. The *add+vantage* modules (M1), the career development modules (M3) and the embedded employability skills (M5)) all show strongly on this employability impact. Interaction with these aspects of the programme of change did therefore have some contingent causality for the majority of graduates' in creating their social reality in relation to employability. Therefore it could be argued that the programme of change for these interviewees has been more of a trigger for employability development rather than their initial graduate employment.

The third aspect of impact relates to the context variable of FG and NFG graduates. As discussed in the introduction to section 5.2 some previous research (Brennan and Shah, 2003; Purcell et al, 2005) suggests that NFG graduates may have a higher propensity to access employment enhancing opportunities than FG graduates. The evidence from the discussion in section 5.2.1 shows that on this narrative empirical level there is no evidence of a FG – NFG division in responses to questions about the mechanisms in the programme of change.

5.3 AN EXPLORATION OF THE WIDER EMPLOYABILITY SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The previous section explores the interview responses on the basis of the primary coding of the data (see section 4.3). In essence the analysis is a recontextualised exploration of the interview data relating directly to the programme of change. The responses were used to explore the impact of M0-M6 on employability, employment and the FG/NFG context differential and address research objective 1. Therefore the primary coding of section 5.2 has enabled a realist evaluation focusing on outcomes and “what might work for whom in what circumstance” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). In this sense section 5.2 concludes the final ‘programme specification’ stage in the realist evaluation cycle outlined at the start of chapter 4 (figure 4.1).

However one of the benefits of using a research approach based on critical realism, and a realist interview method, is the opportunity to move beyond focusing on outcomes and to explore the data from a wider perspective (Kempster and Parry, 2011). Research objective 4 relates to using the research to inform practice enhancements something, it was argued earlier, which cannot be done by simply looking at outcomes. Therefore this current section is concerned with, to quote Richards (2009), “taking off from the data ... thinking about themes” and therefore extending the exploration of the data beyond the outcomes focus of the realist evaluation of section 5.2. In critical realist terms the analysis is still dealing with the context constrained empirical domain (Fleetwood, 2005; A:-Moudi and Willmott, 2011) but exploring the graduates’ interaction with the employability social structure as a whole rather than focusing on the potential mechanisms defined in my CMO configuration (figure 4.6). The exploration of the data from this perspective is moving towards the critical realist view, developed in chapter 2, of employability being individually unique and based on the past actions of the interviewees.

Chapter 2 identified the current consensus view of employability, evident in Government policy, arises from concepts based on human capital theory where success is based upon accumulated credentials (Shultz, 1971; Smetherham, 2006). Although this view was heavily critiqued as, from a critical realist perspective, focusing too heavily on outcome rather than process, it is a worth examining the data from this perspective to highlight a number of issues.

In terms of the employability social structure shown in figure 4.6 the unbroken arrows leading from UCAS entry points → degree → graduate level job, captures the meritocratic consensus view (section 2.3). What the data reveals is that although all the interviewees gained good degrees, and subsequently graduate level jobs, there is a wide variation in the UCAS university entry points (appendix 4 (a)). These range from 200 (Frank) to 340 (Anna). Five of the interviewees would not have gained a place on their course if they had applied after 2008 when the Faculty significantly increased its course entry requirements. This finding does raise a number of issues relating to access to Higher Education, particularly for Universities such as my own who have traditionally recruited a proportion of pre-university under achievers.

Thus it would appear that the accumulation of credentials for most of the interviewees was more of a general kind: UCAS points + degree, rather than related to a specific level of UCAS point + degree class. However one element of graduate labour market entrance that Steve (90-91) and Tim (109) were aware of is the high UCAS points required by some graduate employers. However as will be discussed in section 5.4 the interviewees' attitude towards their own employability raises some interesting issues in relation to the consensus/ conflict - absolutist/ relativist debate around employability.

The critical realist conceptualisation of employability used for my research recognises the part played by the "... wider aspects of graduates' social and cultural experiences" (Tomlinson, 2010, p.80-81) in the development of their employability. More specifically, in the Bourdieusian tradition discussed in chapter 2, the contention is that NFG graduates with higher levels of social and cultural capital have access to labour market opportunities not open to FG graduates. One way to approach this issue is to examine the manner by which the interviewees obtained their graduate job. As discussed in section 3.1 the first CHERI reports (Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002) identifies seven successful job search techniques which provides a useful framework for comparing the techniques used by my interviewees. Table 5.9 summarises the successful job search techniques identified by the interviewees.

Table 5.9– Job Search Techniques used by interviewees

Technique	Principle Direct Technique	Secondary Techniques
Using contacts established during the course of study	Anna, Claire, Deepak, Steve	Beth, Frank, Rose
Contacting employers without knowing about a vacancy		Steve
Seeking assistance from teaching staff		Beth, Claire, Deepak, Ed, Frank, Steve, Tim
Using the institution's careers service		Tim
Using personal contacts	Ed, Rose	Tim
Applying for an advertised vacancy	Beth, Claire, Frank, Gary, Tim	
Being approached by an employer		

Based on Blasko, Brennan, Little and Shah, 2002, p.8

The most striking feature of the table 5.9, as already noted in section 5.2.2, is the importance of academic staff as a secondary support. However the majority of interviewees obtained their post-graduation job either from contacts established during their time at university (all associated with work experience) or by applying for advertised vacancies. Two of the three NFG interviewees were assisted by personal family contacts that were at least partly responsible for their eventual graduate job. This is in direct contrast to the FG interviewees none of whom used family contacts, although Ed used a wider circle of contacts linked to his previous work experience. Indeed Ed along with Claire (see pervious quotes Ed, 324-325 and Claire, 289), are both quite insistent that they did it themselves without family help. However the contacts used by Rose and Tim are family friends who happened to know about posts that are vacant. It is difficult to conclude that this is anything other

than a coincidence rather than connected to Rose and Tim, as NFG graduates, having access to social capital not open to the FG interviewees (Bourdieu, 1986).

What is perhaps more revealing is the recognition by Rose and Tim of the importance of contact networks

“... network as much possible because you never know what your contacts can do for you, even if it’s the least expected person in the world there still might be something there” (Rose, 204-206)

“Building a relationship with them and bugging XX (*course tutor*) to death by knocking on her door all the time allowed me much more access to the people that mattered than if I hadn’t done so,” (Tim, 419-421)

These comments are stark contrast with the attitude of Claire and Ed mentioned above (Ed, 324-325 and Claire, 289). Rose and Tim’s recognition of the importance of networks does reflect comments made by Purcell et al (2005) that “... those from a managerial and professional social class reported making greater use of networks...” (p. 8).

The same difference between FG and NFG interviewees is also reflected in aspects of their relationship with tutors. As already noted a strong enabling variable for the successful employment outcome was one-to-one contact with tutors. However the data reveals a distinct difference in how the two groups view this contact. For NFG Steve and Tim (see quote above, Tim 419-412) the contact was directly linked to their future careers

“In a sense some of the lecturers, like XX (Dept employability tutor named). It just helped because you could always go and have a chat to them and they talked to you about real life situations and how it was” (Steve, 167-169)

However for many of the FG interviewees contact with their tutors was seen as a means of overcoming some of the wider issues around their university experience. FG responses to the question regarding potential other and missing impact factors from their course gives a sense of uncertainty during their university experience with references to feeling segregated (see Beth, 116 quoted earlier), needing to be looked after (see Claire, 195-198 quoted earlier), and needing a lot of support and guidance

(see Ed, 125-126 quoted earlier). This is also evident in the FGs' common desire for more vocational elements to their courses including more guest speakers:

“As vocational as my course is I'd have liked perhaps a bit more of a, kind of, vocational ... even more vocational aspect to it, make it a bit more practical in the sense of ... “ (Gary, 247-248)

“In terms of could the university do more (pause). The only thing I would probably ask for which we had a couple of times with YY (*Strategy module leader*) have people come in, guest speakers, to talk about what they do, how did they get into their career” (Deepak, 229-234)

“I can recall a lecture with ZZ (*Strategic Management lecturer named*) in the last year where he brought in three ex- students [...] that was the only time were we have any time in the whole of the three years were we had talking to us from an employee's point of view” (Ed, 261-266).

As will be discussed in more detail below, the need for FG interviewees' to see how their degree content relates to the workplace reveals an instrumental view of doing a degree simply to get a better job (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2007). The feelings on insecurity and the general more needy aspect of the FG graduates also echoes the findings from WP research (particularly Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010) and some of the earlier employability research (Brennan and Shah, 2003). These attitudinal differences between FG and NFG will be returned to in section 5.4 when considering how the interviewees managed their employability.

Section 5.1 considers the interviewees' individual profiles, however when looking across these profiles some interesting commonalities begin to emerge. One key aspect is the decision taken in relation to the first entrance in figure 4.6, that of university entrance. Looking at the responses from the ten interviewees, six stated that their intention had always been to go to University, including all the NFG interviewees. All of the NFG interviewees came from families where going to university is the norm and seen as 'a natural progression' (Steve, 48), 'evolved with my education' (Tim, 152), 'knew I would end up going' (Rose, 54). The only NFG who seems to have considered not going was Tim, but this was only very briefly before parental pressures lead him to drop the idea:

“I quite fancied the idea of being an electrician, I was quite ... I went to a couple of presentations at colleges and things like that but I didn’t receive nearly as much, you know, positive support with that as I did with ... (PC – What from your parents?) ... yeah ... as I did when I mentioned University” (Tim, 155-158).

By way of contrast for the FG interviewees the expectation that they would simply progress to university was less common with four making a relatively late decision and only one having any wider family experience of university. The three FG interviewees who stated that the intention had always been to go to University all explicitly link the decision, at least partially, to their future job prospects:

“Ever since I can remember I wanted to. I’ve never been someone who’s not liked education. I’ve always understood the meaning behind everything – you know why you do it. I always wanted to get a good job.” (Frank, 71-72)

“...quite eager, to prolong my schooling for kind of enjoyment reasons as well. Aside from that, that’s the kind of one aspect to it, on the other hand there’s the whole kind of like of idea of career progress, things like that, so I turned to Marketing Management“ (Gary, 58-62)

–“It was the idea that if I could achieved what I had achieved at sort of 16/17 what could I achieve with a degree and bit more experience that pushed the Business side of it more” (Anna, 63-64).

With the exception of Ed who did not really give a clear answer to the question, the other three FG interviewees also strongly linked the late decision to go to university directly to future careers and job prospects (Beth, 36-38; Claire, 51-55; Deepak, 28-33). Claire providing the most forthright response of “To get a good job basically and have lots of money” (51)

The responses therefore show that for the NFG interviewees the initial progression onto university was seen as just the next step, although interviewee Tim does cite job prospects as a consideration when he returns to university as a full-time student at a later date. However all of the FG interviewees (with the exception of Ed due to his unclear answer), irrespective of when they decided to go, link the decision to go to university to job options at the next post university stage. This instrumental attitude

seeing university as primarily a means to getting a better job, rather than an end in itself, reflects a "... go through university rather than university going through them" (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010, p.112) attitude. This finding may offer some explanation to the problem I had identifying NFG graduates who met my selection criteria discussed in section 4.2.3. The tendency of the NFG graduates interviewed not to link going to university with their final job prospects may indicate that they are more inclined to delay entry into the graduate labour market by taking a Masters.

In terms of other influences in the interviewees social and biographical backgrounds which appear to have influenced the decisions to go to university most mention the importance of the support of parents (see the individual profiles in section 5.1). As commented on in section 5.1 only Beth suggested that her immediate family had not been a factor (Beth, 192-196). However the importance of family seems to diminish by the time the interviewees approach the graduate labour market entrance in figure 4.6. This is reflected in the FG Likert scale responses averaging of 2.6 and NFG of 3.0, both around the margin of 'slight' and 'some' impact. All the interviewees indicated that the choice of degree subject was essentially their own, although Anna and Claire made some reference to their mother's influence. Six of the ten interviewees based their choice on the fact that they'd enjoyed Business at School/ 6th Form/ College. As noted in section 5.1 Tim and Gary provide interesting responses as both suggest that they made choices pre-university which were not entirely of their own making (Tim, 8-10; Gary, 81-82).

Therefore there is some limited evidence of differential opportunities open to the NFG which may have impacted on their success in the graduate labour market but the evidence is not conclusive. However what are more evident are attitudinal differences both within the interviewees and their families. These suggest possible differences in how the two groups of interviewees interpret and respond to the elements within the employability social structure. Firstly there are clear differences between FG and NFG in their original motivations for going to university. As has already been noted the NFG interviewees give less directly instrumental answers in terms of future job prospects than do the FG interviewees. Also the family assumption that all the NFG would go to university is another clear difference from the FG interviewees where this was not by any means always the case. The family response to Tim's brief flirtation with not going to university, for example, is

illustrative of this point (Tim, 155-158). The second major difference between FG and NFG is the more 'needy' attitude evident amongst the FG graduates whilst at university – the need to be looked after, the need for confirmation of their abilities, the worry about their relative prospects and the need to see the value of what they were doing in relation to future jobs.

As was suggested at the start of this section to develop research-informed enhancements it is important to understand the impact of the employability social structure from the perspective of the graduates. Indeed the strength of the critical realist approach can be illustrated through considering the findings in relation to the role played by tutors. The realist evaluation in section 5.1 revealed that the impact of tutors on the employment outcome of graduates was a 'missing' mechanism from my CMO configuration. However the wider exploration of the data in section 5.2.2 has highlighted a difference between the role played by tutors in relation to FG and NFG interviewees which was not evident from the outcome focused evaluation. Similarly differences have emerged between FG and NFG interviewees relating to attitude towards university and the university experience which were not evident in the outcomes focused realist evaluation of the programme of change in section 5.2.

In critical realists terms the exploration of data from the wider perspective of the social structure as a whole has uncovered differences between the social reality created by FG and NFG graduates. The critical realist conceptualisation of employability emphasises the individualised nature of the process (Tomlinson, 2010) with employability being developed as a social process through each agent's active engagement with the social structure. However the results discussed above do show some commonalities within the FG and NFG graduates and also differences between the FG and NFG context. Therefore, within my research sample, we can conclude that there are some attitudinal demi-regs (Lawson, 1998) which are specific to the FG context which do not appear in the NFG context, and vice versa. However the findings in relation to the programme of change reported in 5.1 revealed no apparent differences between FG and NFG interviewees in relation to impact on either employability or the employment outcome. This suggests that the differences found within the overall social structure were not actually impacting on the graduates' interaction with the programme of change.

The discussion in this section has therefore shown how the adoption of a critical realist approach has provided a much richer and, from a practice perspective, useful contribution to the evaluation of the employability social structure. As highlighted at the start of this section, one of the motivations for undertaking this wider exploration of the data was to identify any practice improvements which could be made (research objective 4). The themes which have emerged in this, and the previous section, do have practice implications which will be considered in more depth chapter 6.

5.4 THE GRADUATES AS ACTIVE MANAGERS OF THEIR EMPLOYABILITY

One of the key aspects to adopting a critical realist view of employability is the recognition that the students are themselves active participants in the creation of their employability. In terms of the evaluation of the employability enhancements it is important to recognise that for the graduates these were part of a wider university experience in which they were active participants. Therefore this section will explore, in Tomlinson's words "... how they approach their employability and the world of work more generally" (Tomlinson, 2010, p.81). In effect the analysis will move away from my original practitioner needs to evaluate the programme of change to an exploration of the data from the interviewees' active employability development perspective.

One of the key common elements running through the interviews is the sense that the interviewees were actively shaping their own success. In a critical realist sense they are pro-active agents in trying to shape the social structure to achieve their desired outcomes. The fact that five (Beth, Claire, Ed, Steve, Gary) of them not only realised that they would need work experience whilst at university but actively went out and gained the experience is one example. Gary provides a good illustration of this proactive approach to gaining work experience:

"I'd been quite proactive after ... So this was like during my second year I saw all these kinds of problems and I saw all these kind of horizons like I need to go out and do something about it. So in the summer of my second year, between my second and third, I went and got my own job, related to what I'm doing now, in a company called WW (*company name*) up in

London - Shaftsbury Avenue. I went out of my way by getting in contact with them. I applied for jobs, I was really trying hard to get some kind of relevant work experience for that summer, I got it, I worked at WW all summer. The pay wasn't fantastic and because of the kind of commute, which I touched on earlier on, (*G's commute is 2 hours in from Kent*) financially it was rubbish but I knew it was kind of work experience which was going to stand me in good stead." (Gary, 116-122)

Another example is the manner in which both Tim and Gary reversed previous decisions taken by parents around university entrance. Tim's reflective response to the question about the impact of his parents interestingly illustrates this point

"... it was them in the first place that, like I said, was the influence to go to University, do well etc and I ... well no, I did that and then backed out of it and did for myself and that was a big impact so I suppose that's not my family that's me isn't it" Tim (412-414)

More generally the majority of the interviewees, particularly the FGs, reflected a strong self efficacy (Dweck, 1999; Bandura, 1997) in achieving their success:

"... I got it myself" (Deepak, 280);

"Personal ... effort in getting out and, kind of being productive" (Gary, 343).

This sense of self efficacy is evident in several other areas, for example in how many of the interviewees gained their work experience (see also Beth, 168-175 quoted earlier):

"Yes from when I was about 16 or 17 I knew the area, so I went and got the work experience from when I was a young age" (Claire, 91-92)

"... WW gave a really good presentation and I stuck around and spoken to him afterwards [...] I managed to organise a week's work ..." (Tim, 309-310)

Many of the FG interviewees are particularly forthright in response to question concerning help from any personal contacts they may have had in gaining their graduate job:

“I really follow that if I want to do something I do it” (Beth, 197)

“... I don't have anyone” (Claire, 289)

“... I got it myself.” (Deepak, 280)

“Personal, kind of, effort in getting out and, kind of, being productive in getting myself experience and stuff like that” (Gary, 343).

The interviews therefore suggest the perception of graduates' that have actively managed their employability by developing their 'array of resources' (Lewis, 2000), both before and during their university experience, to make a successful transition into the graduate labour market.

This strong sense of self efficacy is also shown in the final question in the interview schedule where the interviewees are given the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt about themselves. The majority (Anna, Beth, Claire, Frank, Steve and Tim) feel that they have grown not only in their own self confidence but also in their ability to shape their own destiny. Steve is a good example as someone who came across in the interview as generally an introvert however in the self reflection question towards the end of the interview states:

“I'm a lot more confident now. I can meet anyone one my own or with people and be confident 'cause sometimes people are confrontational in this kind of job. I'm now able to play it cool, not get up-tight about it ...” Steve, 260-263)

This sense seems to be common to both FG and NFG as represented by the comments from Claire (“...I can do anything (266)) and Tim (“...if you want to achieve something you can achieve it” (397)) both of which are expressing very similar sentiments.

Therefore the interviewees reflect the same “discourse of individualism” found in the graduates interviewed by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) in relation to their employability. As discussed in the previous section this ‘I can do anything’ attitude suggests an acceptance by the majority of the interviewees of the consensus/ human capital view of employability that you can achieve your goals through your own efforts. However for the FG interviewees this does actually represent a shift in

perception. The interviewees' response to what they originally perceived to be potential obstacles within the graduate labour market (appendix 4 c, figure 2) actually reflects a different view point. What is particularly noticeable in these responses is that six of the seven FG interviewees were initially concerned about their relative employability rather than their absolute employability (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003). Their responses reveal concerns about how employable they were going to be in relation to other graduates with more work experience and from 'better' universities. By way of contrast two of the three NFG interviewees expressed concerns related to their absolute employability, raising issues about their credentials in relation to their A-level results. This again seems to demonstrate in the FGs a lack of confidence about themselves and their abilities whilst at university something which is not as evident in the NFG graduates. These concerns echo those discussed in section 5.2.2 in relation to the FG interactions with tutors.

However, as noted above, five of the interviewees actively sort to remedy the potential problems identified by seeking out work experience to enhance their chances. In a sense this reinforces the interviewee's consensus perspective on employability. Claire, for example, originally thought her lack of work experience, dyslexia and the university she attended might have been problems in the graduate labour market. However the fact that she overcame these perceived issues strengthens her sense of her own self efficacy:

"I've done my degree and I've got a first class degree and I only came out with 4 GCSEs at C grade and above and it means it doesn't really matter you can do anything you want, you've just got to apply yourself – and that's what I'm doing now, I'm working my way up in the job and working towards becoming a chartered marketer." (Claire, 266-267).

The interviewees also reflect the view found amongst the final year students interviewed by Tomlinson of the importance of "... both their hard credentials as well as their 'soft' currencies" (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 291). Five of the interviewees named gaining work experience as the key piece of advice they would give to current students (appendix 4c). Thus the idea of human capital needs to be viewed in a broader sense than just certified credentials, as originally described by Schultz (1971), to include, in this case, the 'soft credentials' of work experience.

Interestingly none of the interviewees gave ‘get a good degree’ in response to the question about advice to current students. This strengthens the suggestion made in section 5.2 that their good degree may be an unacknowledged mechanism within the social structure of employability.

However, when analysing the data from a broader perspective a more complex picture begins to emerge. Looking at comments made by FG graduates in relation to their time at university the strong sense of self efficacy is somewhat at odds with how they describe some of their university experience. As highlighted in section 5.2 this is an area where there is an apparent difference between FG and NFG in that FGs exhibit more of a sense of uncertainty about themselves and their future direction. As already noted in section 5.3 there is a distinct difference in how the two groups view the contact with tutors. NFG interviewees Steve and Tim directly linked this to their future careers (see earlier quotes Steve, 167-169; Tim, 418-421), whereas many of the FG see the importance as helping them through university. This is also evident in the common desire for more vocational elements to their courses and the request for more guest speakers which reveals a need from them to see how the degree content relates to the workplace as discussed previously (see earlier quotes Beth, 116; Claire, 195-198; Ed, 125-16; Gary, 247-251; Deepak 229-234)..

Therefore the assumption made in 2006 in implementing an employability strategy for the Faculty that the ‘self’ element of the USEM framework (Yorke and Knight, 2006) needed particular attention for FG students appears to have been correct and has to some extent been addressed. However what also appears to be the case is that even though many of the graduates now present a confident ‘I can do anything’ (Claire, 266) attitude after their time at university, their time at university, particularly for the FG interviewees, was one of uncertainty about themselves and their futures. To use Brennan and Shah’s phrase they “... remain ‘strangers’ in the university community” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p. V).

In a critical realist sense the influence of a graduate’s lack of family higher education experience would appear to be an unconscious aspect of how they respond to the social reality of being a university student. These findings echoes the results of the WP literature discussed in chapter 3. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) comment on the differences between the learner identities of working class and middle class

students at university and the “... sense of self doubt and anxiety around learning” (p.117) of the working class. However as noted when discussing the WP literature we should not fall into the trap of equating ‘working class’ with ‘FG student’. Many of the FG interviewees’ parents had what would be regarded as middle class occupations, for example Ed’s mother is a careers advisor and Frank’s father is a company director. Equating having a middle class occupation with having a degree is, for the moment, a false assumption. What seems to be more relevant is the lack of higher education experience in the student’s family background.

One of the main issues raised in relation to the practitioner focus of the research was the particular meaning this gives to ‘success’. From the practitioner perspective the ‘output’ element of the CMO configuration (figure 4.6) is a job categorised by DLHE as a graduate job. The assumption made when designing the realist evaluation was that for the programme of change to be effective then it should increase the number of successful graduate job outcomes. However, as discussed in section 3.3, the critical realist view of employability as a social process which is individually managed and developed suggests an alternative criterion for ‘success’. From a critical realist viewpoint the interpretation of ‘success’ in the graduate labour market needs to come from the interviewee’s perspective and not from my practitioner perspective.

A useful starting point for this discussion is to return to the differences revealed in final year students interviewed by Tomlinson and summarised in his ‘ideal-type of student orientation’ schematic reproduced in figure 3.3 (Tomlinson, 2007). As discussed in section 3.3 for those students intending to enter the labour market Tomlinson noted a difference between those who took a proactive and instrumental approach to managing their employability and future career (‘careerists’) and those who took a more passive approach and tended to settle for stable but less financially rewarding jobs (‘ritualists’). Of the ten graduates interviewed for my research Gary and Tim are representative of Tomlinson’s careerist attitude. In terms of managing their employability Gary deliberately sought out work experience opportunities which would support him in his final job objective (see earlier quote Gary, 116-124) whilst Tim gave up a full-time post to return to full-time study (Tim, 64-66) to open up more career opportunities. Similarly both Gary and Tim took planned and calculating approaches to labour market entry with both fully aware of what they

needed to do to the play the graduate labour market entry game. Tim, for example, states

“I went to the graduate recruitment fair [...] I actually went the year before I finished university, just to sort of scope it out really, [...] So for the second year running in September I went to the NEC, the graduate recruitment fair, and put myself out there really I was open for any ideas but it was supply chain management or purchasing roles that I was interested in, [...]” (Tim, 199-203).

Gary and Tim also exhibit a clear vision as to their future aims, both having clearly thought about their future possible career paths and how they might achieve those aims:

“... if I work in-house as in my job in XX [...] I can get as high as I can in SEO but then I’m going to get to a kind of glass ceiling in terms of the next step up is going to be a director of traffic kind of stand point [...] So that’s a bit of, potentially, a concern [...]. On the other side if I worked for an agency, websites would come into my agency asking for SEO services the likelihood is that I’d be more in a kind of like account manager role for that client and so the likelihood is that I’d have a lot more input on their newsletter or their APT, all these different aspects ... “(Gary, 276-286)

“I’d like to continue in what I’m doing now to get to the end of my training programme and to get into a buyers role. I’d like to do some time as a buyer. I’m interested in retail purchasing as well (*comments aside*). I’d like to get some experience of retail purchasing [...]” (Tim 337-343).

At the other extreme Rose shows perhaps the most ritualist approach in that she appears to have never really thought seriously about what she wanted to do at any stage, as she says:

“... it’s just carried me on really” (Rose, 82)

The impression is that she’s just ended up where she is by simply reacting to opportunities as they arose without ever consciously trying to make things happen in the determined way of Gary and Tim. This ‘going with the flow’ attitude even

extends to her future career where she admits that she does not really know what she wants to do. Compare Rose's comments below with those of Gary and Tim quoted above:

“ For the time being (laughs). I'm enjoying the marketing experience. Again I don't know, I still don't know what I really want to do in my career. I know I enjoy business and I enjoy the fast pace of it all “(Rose, 192-193).

Therefore within my interview sample there does appear to be clear representatives of both careerists and ritualists. However for the other interviewees the careerist-ritualist dichotomy is a little too blunt a distinction to carry over from final year aspirations to labour market reality. A finer distinction needs to be made. Firstly one of the characteristics of the Tomlinson careerist is that they actively manage their employability to try and achieve their labour market goals. This is a common feature of a number of the graduate interviewees. Beth, Claire, Frank, Gary and Steve, for example, all actively sought work experience having realised this was going to be a key factor in their achieving a graduate job. However not all of them had careerist aspirations. Beth is a good case in point. She only initially goes to university because she cannot find a job which she feels suited to:

“ Before I went to college I looked at apprenticeships originally but they weren't really forthcoming on places that wanted to give you them really and that was in administration and didn't think I would be massively happy with it [...] you apply through UCAS you do it the year before, and it wasn't until I couldn't find a job that I wanted....” (Beth, 49-57)

However whilst at university Beth is proactive in acquiring some relevant work experience, realising that she has no relevant office-based work experience (see earlier quote Beth, 165-172). However her general attitude towards her job is clearly ritualist in that she has no real wish to move from her present post. Despite being in a Human Resources post, she has no immediate plans to start the CIPD professional qualification, the accepted means by which to progress in Human Resources (Beth, 152-154). It would be difficult to place Beth in the same ritualist category as Rose, but it is also equally difficult to place her in the same careerist category as Gary or Tim. Beth is perhaps best described as an 'active ritualist' whereas Rose is a 'passive ritualist'.

Of the other interviewees Deepak, Ed and Steve show a number of interesting commonalities. Firstly all three applied for graduate trainee schemes, and all three failed to even get beyond the application stage (see earlier quote Ed, 113-118):

“ I have applied for graduate jobs with Jaguar, Nationwide, Network Rail, Virgin [...] when I get feedback from companies who I’ve not been successful with they always say that we’ve had a massive intake of applications” (Deepak, 105-106)

“PC – Did you get any interviews?

No, none at all, Because [...] I already knew about this job I did not try as hard as I could of because I knew I’d got this as basically a fall-back I thought I’d better apply other places just in case” (Steve, 92-96).

Secondly all three interviewees’ eventual destination was related to their work experience employment, in the case of Deepak and Steve as employees, in the case of Ed trying to develop his own business further. On this basis Deepak, Ed and Steve could be referred to as ‘frustrated careerists’, having failed to achieve their initial goal they all have settled for ‘safer’ jobs in their current employment. However Deepak and Steve have both been offered opportunities with their employers which potentially will satisfy their careerist aims (Deepak, 236-247: Steve, 200-212), so perhaps they will only be temporary ‘frustrated careerists’. Similarly Anna also tried for graduate training schemes and failed so in that sense she is also a frustrated careerist. However she has also ended up a job which has a clear career progression. Beth and Frank are similar to Claire in that they actively sought to manage their employability through being proactive in gaining work experience and, in Frank’s case, switching courses. However none of them display the careerist traits of Tim and Gary.

Table 5.10 summarises how the ten interviewees would divide between the more finely defined extension to Tomlinson’s original entry careerist/ ritualist dichotomy suggested by the above discussion.

Table 5.10 Actual Graduate Ideal-type Orientations

Active Ritualists	Beth, Claire, Frank		Successful Careerists	Tim, Gary
Passive Ritualists	Rose		Frustrated Careerists	Anna, Deepak, Ed, Steve

Two interesting additional points emerge. Firstly the role that work experience plays in employability is rather more complex than would at first appear. As discussed in section 5.2.3 work placement can be regarded as a deep domain generative mechanism (Fleetwood, 2005; Al-Amoudi and Willmott H., 2011) as shown by the fact that half of the interviewees gained jobs post-graduation with their work experience employer. There is also some evidence that for some of the FG interviewees work experience was a factor in helping to overcome some of the uncertainties about their graduate identities. The work experience has been instrumental in terms of confidence building and mitigating the uncertainties surrounding their university experiences. Therefore work experience seems to have been a factor in helping the interviewees to an affirmation of their graduate identities in the sense used by Holmes (2001). However for the three ‘frustrated careerist’ who returned to their work experience employer this was not actually a positive choice but rather acted as a safety net choice. For Deepak, Ed and Steve the sense is that they have actually failed to reach their aspirations by having to fall back on their work experience employer.

The second interesting point is one which is a key finding of the research project from a practice perspective, and relates to interviewee Tim. Of the six interviewees who tried the traditional graduate management trainee route for business students (Anna, Deepak, Ed, Frank, Steve and Tim) he is the only one who actually got beyond the first stage and, indeed, eventually had a choice of management trainee posts (Tim, 220-221). The other distinguishing feature of Tim is that he was the only one of the ten interviewees who used the University careers service (see previous quotes Tim, 291-292 and 424-425). Tim clearly feels that this was a key impact on

his eventual success, particularly in the support it provided in helping him prepare for entering the graduate labour market entry process. In other words it taught him how to play the graduate labour market entry game. For a number of other interviewees this is clearly lacking, Frank for example felt wholly unprepared for the open day interviews he attended (Frank, 160-167) whilst Deepak not only admits that “I saw the application and just filled it in” but also that perhaps he did need some support (Deepak, 182-185).

What emerges is that, not only for the ‘frustrated careerists’, but also for the other interviewees who tried unsuccessfully to enter a graduate management training programme there is a lack of preparedness as to how to play the game, how to get beyond the initial application stage. This issue does not appear to be one related to a graduates’ accumulated social and cultural capital nor, indeed, even their credentialed human capital, but relates more to the fact that the labour market is “... becoming ever more elaborate” (Brennan and Shah, 2003, p. vii). The issue is one of how to translate a careerist orientated final year student’s employability into successful careerist employment. Essentially what emerges from the above discussion is that ‘employability skills’ are not the same as ‘skills for employment’. The skills needed for gaining employment relate directly to being able to cope with the selection practices of the job market segment being applied to. This is recognised by some the interviewees in response to the ‘missing mechanisms’ question, particularly the NFGs (see appendix 4b, figure 9). From a practice perspective the lack of engagement with the careers service discussed in 5.2 is clearly a major issue if I am to reduce the number of frustrated careerists’ graduates, something which will be returned to in chapter 6.

The difference explored above between employment and employability ‘skills’ is in fact a mirror image of the distinction made in the introduction to section 5.2 between an ‘employability impact’ and an ‘employment impact’. An employability impact was reflected in an enhancement of an individual’s “skills, understandings and personal attributes [to] be successful in their chosen occupations” (Yorke 2004) whereas an ‘employment impact’ enabled the individual to play the employment entry game more effectively. The current tendency to conflate ‘employability’ and ‘employment’ has practice implications which will be considered in chapter 6.

The final concluding comment to make is that for these successful graduates there seems to be no obvious FG and NFG intra-group commonalities within the framework developed by Tomlinson. With the exception of Rose all of the interviewees seem to have consciously managed their employability to some extent, displaying what Tomlinson refers to as “instrumental rationality” (Tomlinson, 2007), this is particularly shown through the active pursuit of work experience. However there is no evidence of more careerist tendencies amongst the NFG interviewees, indeed the only passive ritualist interviewee was interviewee Rose. We should also apply the same caveat in relation to Tomlinson’s work as to the WP literature and not simply assume that a FG graduate comes from a working class background.

5.5 GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF A CRITICAL REALIST APPROACH

This chapter has presented a critical realist exploration of the interview data as an example of how the perspective can be used to enhance understanding of a specific area of educational practice. Section 5.2 and 5.3 presents an exploration of the research data guided by my initial practitioner needs in relation to the programme of change introduced in 2006/07 (research objective 1). However, as was discussed in section 4.3.1, in order to achieve research object 4 and make research-informed practice enhancements I needed to consider employability as being individually managed and developed by the interviewees. This critical realist view of employability as a social process which was actively managed by the interviewees as they interacted with the employability social structure was explored in section 5.4. This final section will reflect on some of the broader issues to have emerged from the research highlighting in particular the perceived benefits of adopting a critical realists approach and the new insights it has provided into the area of employability (research objective 3).

In the discussion on critical realism as a research method in sections 1.3 and 4.2 the point was made that critical realism is a philosophical view of reality not a research method (Lawson, 1998; Mearman, 2006; Lewis, 2009). At the core of the critical realist perspective is the notion that the social world consists of pre-existing ‘social facts’ (Pring, 2004) which have an existence outside of the agents within the social structure. The research process involves exploring the social structure through

how agents actively engage with it and identifying what Lawson (1998) refers to as the social structure's "emergent properties". The research design outlined in chapter 4 has facilitated a critical realist exploration of the employability social structure identified through previous research in chapter 3. The findings of the research discussed in sections 5.2 to 5.4 are based on the experiences of the 10 graduates interviewed and have sort to "... clarify and illuminate" (Lewis, 2009, p.111) any commonalities in the experiences of the interviewees which might be evidence of contingent causality.

What has emerged through the research process is that the adoption of a critical realist approach has problematised key aspects of the research which were not envisaged at the outset. Thus in the practitioner-focused thesis title 'impact', 'successful' and 'employability' have all taken on more complex meanings as the research has progressed. In the original practitioner-focus of 'employability' equating with 'employment' the realist evaluation of the programme of change (section 5.2.2) shows that the programme of change has a minimal impact. Similarly there were no differential impacts between FG and NFG. However as discussed in section 5.4, and developed further below, the decoupling of 'employment' from 'employability' leads to the conclusion that aspects of the programme of change did have an impact on 'employability' when used in the critical realist sense. However, again there were no evident comparative differences between FG and NFG graduates. Similarly 'success' was originally defined from my practitioner focus as being whether a graduate appears in the DLHE statistic as having a defined graduate level job. However when viewed from the perspective of the graduate, 'success' post-graduation should be regarded as being whether the individual has achieved their pre-graduation job aspiration. This insight comes directly from regarding employability as something which is socially constructed by each graduate and part of the social reality created is the individual's post-graduation aspirations. From a practice perspective there is an issue over whether we should regard 'success' purely in DLHE terms or whether we should also be concerned with reducing the number of post-graduation frustrated careerist. My own view would be that we should be providing opportunities for students to hit both measures of 'success'.

One of the main benefits of using a critical realist approach is shown in sections 5.3 and 5.4. In these sections I was able to "take off from the data" (Richards, 2009)

firstly to explore the employability social structure (section 5.3) and secondly to consider more closely the critical realist view of employability (section 5.4). This allowed for a much deeper and richer evaluation of employability, and the identification of FG and NFG differences which were not evident by just looking at the direct impact of the programme of change. This is certainly the case compared with my initial inclination to adopt a purely statistical analysis of the Faculty's DLHE data. The practice implications of this approach and how I used the results to make practice enhancements will be considered in detail in chapter 6.

As discussed in section 2.3 the adoption of a critical realist perspective lead to a view of employability as being an individualised social process (Tomlinson, 2007) concerned with the "... skills, understandings and personal attributes "(Yorke, 2004) that leads to "sustainable employment" (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). As referred to above what became evident in exploring the data was that this view of employability does not equate merely with the ability to get a graduate level job, in fact the two are quite different. Therefore, as discussed in the introduction to section 5.2, I was careful in analysing the data to make the distinction between impacts on 'employability', as an individual's ability to develop and sustain graduate employment, and 'employment', as the ability to make a successful transition into the graduate labour market.

Reflecting back on the consensus/ human capital and conflict/Bourdieu discussion in section 2.3 both of these views make the assumption that 'employability' equates with success in the graduate labour market. From the critical realist perspective both are in fact conflating 'employability' and 'employment'. The same conflation is evident in much of the literature reviewed in chapter 3. However interestingly, as noted in section 2.3, the original definitions of employability considered (CBI, 1999; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; and Yorke, 2004) at the start of that section do actually reflect the critical realist view of employability. This distinction between 'employability' and 'employment' which has emerged through the adoption of critical realist view employability is one of the key insights to emerge from my research (research objective 3). As noted in chapter 2 the critical realist view of employability does actually provide a theoretical basis to the original intuitive definitions of employability (CBI, 1999; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; and Yorke, 2004) which have formed the basis for the policy discourse in the area.

Reflecting back on the programme of change to enhance employability implemented in 2006 it could be argued that we (the University and the Faculty) made the same mistake of conflating ‘employability’ and ‘employment’. The institutional objective behind the programme of change was to improve the DLHE statistics. What my research has shown is that in order to achieve this narrow strategic objective the focus should be on ‘employment’, whereas most of the mechanisms within the programme of change were focused on ‘employability’. For the interviewees this is reflected in the four graduates whom I classified as ‘frustrated careerists’. These four, although they had a DLHE classified graduate jobs, had failed to achieve their careerist-type aspirations through not having developed the necessary ‘employment’ skills to successfully cope with the entry conventions of the graduate jobs they aspired to. From a management perspective there is a need to balance the provision of opportunities for students to develop the market entry ‘employment’ skills alongside allowing students to manage and develop their longer term ‘employability’.

Taking this line of argument a step back the reason for my institution focusing on ‘employment’ is driven by the DLHE measure being a snapshot performance measure based on graduates in pre-defined graduate jobs 6 months after graduation. DLHE is therefore a measure of ‘employment’ and not ‘employability’. It is measuring the very short-term impact of a graduate being able to play the graduate market entry game not their long-term potential to “... benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2004). From this critical realist perspective the DLHE measure is an incentive for Higher Education Institutions to maximise a short-term performance measure rather than the long term potential development of the graduate workforce.

This concluding section to chapter 5 has highlighted some of the insights which have emerged from my research into issues around employability. This discussion will continue in chapter 6 as I move on to consider how the research was used to inform practice enhancements and reflect on the wider benefits of adopting a critical realist for management practice.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE USE OF CRITICAL REALISM FOR PRACTICE-BASED MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

The research undertaken and presented in this thesis is part of a practice-based doctoral programme therefore there is a need to conclude by considering the research outcomes, and also the research process adopted, from this perspective. The overall aim of the research was to use employability as the context for exploring the potential of adopting a critical realist approach as a basis for making research-informed practice enhancements. This concluding chapter is divided into three sections. Section 6.1 discusses how the research findings considered in chapter 5 have been used as a basis for practice enhancements. Section 6.2 broadens the discussion to consider the benefits and limitations of adopting a critical realist perspective as a basis for research-informed management practice. Therefore these sections seek to address research objective 4. The final section offers a personal reflection on the research and my own development through the process.

6.1 HOW THE RESEARCH HAS LEAD TO PRACTICE ENHANCMENTS

As discussed at the start of chapter 1 one key difference of my research compared with previous research in the area is the angle from which I, as the researcher, was exploring the issue of employability. I was approaching the research from the perspective of a senior manager with a view, and the authority, to make actual practice enhancements, rather than as a purely investigatory exercise. As was initially discussed at the end of chapter 1 this was one of the reasons why a critical realist approach was adopted. The increasing use of a critical realist approach in the evaluation of health policy (Ogrinc and Batalden, 2009; Pommier, Guével and Jourdan, 2010; Van Belle et al 2010) demonstrated the potential of the realist evaluation approach of Pawson and Tilley (1997) as a means of assessing a programme of change from a practitioner perspective. As discussed in section 1.4 there are a number of similarities in terms of the policy context between health and higher education (Timmins and Miller, 2007). Both require the manager, for example, to interpret and implement strategic decisions with personal performance

being evaluated against performance targets (Timmins and Miller, 2007). However a research method which just concentrated on undertaking a realist evaluation was thought to be too limiting in terms of developing context specific practice enhancements (sections 4.3).

The inadequacies of a purely outcomes focused approach, either statistical or realist, to evaluation as the basis for practice improvement has been highlighted at various points in the previous chapters. Both a traditional statistical or a Pawson and Tilley realist evaluation may tell you what has caused an outcome however, from a practice perspective, it doesn't tell you why, or how, you can improve the outcome in the future. As has been shown in chapter 5, particularly sections 5.3 and 5.4, the critical realist ontological focus on agents' constructing social reality through interaction with a social structure surfaces a range of practice issues which a purely outcomes focus would not. This has resulted in a number of policy changes which are essentially-based on evidence generated from the 'individual-up' rather than 'management-down'.

However before considering the main practice implications and some of the resulting actions taken, it is appropriate to initially reflect on the concept of employability and how my research has moved this debate on. Another key beneficial aspect discussed in section 1.4 of the critical realist approach, from a management point of view, is the approach of starting with a problem/ issue and working back to an appropriate discourse and research method (Lewis, 2009). In my case the issue centred on the concept of employability. Chapter 2 argued that one appropriate discourse for developing the concept of employability, particularly from a policy perspective, could be drawn from the economists' concept of human capital and sociologists' concepts of social and cultural capital. This eventually lead me to a critical realist view of employability, largely based on Tomlinson (2010), being adopted for the research. Chapter 3 used the previous research into this issue to define an employability social structure, however unlike much previous research I was not trying to identify factors which impacted on employability. What I was more interested in were the practice concerns of how students viewed and engaged with both a specific programme of change and the employability social structure in general.

Section 5.4 highlighted one of the key findings to emerge from the research is the need to distinguish between ‘employability’, as an individual’s ability to develop and sustain graduate employment, and ‘employment’, as the ability to make a ‘successful’ transition into the graduate labour market. The programme of change implemented in 2006 by the University and the Faculty made the same mistake noted in much of the literature of conflating the two (see the Faculty’s 2006 “Employability Implementation Framework” strategy document in appendix 6). The institutional objective behind the programme of change was to improve the DLHE statistics. What my research has shown is that in order to achieve this narrow strategic objective the focus should be on ‘employment’, whereas most of the mechanisms within the implemented programme of change were focused on ‘employability’. The difference between ‘employment’ and ‘employability’ may explain why the Yorke (2004) definition discussed in section 2.3 is commonly found in many Universities. As was noted in section 2.3 the Yorke (2004) definition covers both ‘employment’ (“... make graduates more likely to gain employment”) and ‘employability’ (“... be successful in their chosen careers”).

Taken from my own perspective however merely focusing on the narrow strategic ‘employment’ objective of improving the DLHE statistics would not be morally acceptable. Whilst trying to help students make the initial transition into a DLHE classified graduate job is important what is equally important is that the university experience should also be providing opportunities for students to develop their longer term career sustaining employability. In fact the research has shown that institutions should not only focus on helping students to gain graduate employment but that the employment gained should reflect the student’s career aspiration. The mismatch between achieving the institutional employment objective and graduate employment aspiration is reflected in the four graduates whom I classified as ‘frustrated careerists’. These four, although they had DLHE classified graduate jobs, had failed to achieve their careerist-type aspirations through not having developed the necessary ‘employment’ skills to successfully cope with the entry conventions of the graduate jobs they aspired to.

What the research revealed however was that there was one mechanism, within the programmes of change, which did relate directly to ‘employment’ (in the meeting career-aspiration sense) rather than ‘employability’, which was the enhanced careers

service. However as discussed in section 5.2 all except one interviewee failed to engage with this aspect of the social structure. The research revealed that for most of the interviewees the careers service was seen as being physically remote and not particularly reflecting their needs. The Faculty policy document “Supporting students in achieving a positive destination” (see appendix 6) sets out how the Faculty have responded to these research findings, by investing resources in recruiting a team of Employment Personal Tutors (EPTs). The EPTs are not traditional careers tutors but come from graduate recruitment backgrounds and know how to play the graduate recruitment game. To overcome the remoteness of the careers service the EPTs are based in the Faculty’s Departments and engage with the students from year 1 onwards. In this way the hope is that more students will engage with this aspect of the employability social structure and recognise the need to incorporate employment skills as part of their social reality as they approach the transition into the graduate labour market.

One other area of practice enhancement to emerge from the research relates to the ‘missing mechanism’ discussed in section 5.2.2. Although the definition of employability adopted for the research emphasised the individual nature of employability some commonalities between the FG students in terms of their approach to, and experiences of, university did emerge. As noted in section 5.2.2 the role played by individual tutors in supporting students was missing as a potential trigger mechanism from the original social structure. For the majority of students their tutor was seen as a secondary source of support in terms of job search (figure 5.9) however for the FG graduates they played a wider role of helping them cope with the university experience. The importance of tutors as a potential mechanism within the employability social structure added additional support to a move back to a structured personal tutor system which the Faculty had already begun. The Faculty have now implemented a system of Academic Personal Tutors to complement the EPTs to bring about a more personalised approach to, not just employability development, but general support throughout their university experience.

The above discussion illustrates how the adoption of a critical realist approach not only allowed for evidence-base practice enhancements to be made but also deepened my understanding of the underlying concepts. Both the practice enhancements and greater understanding of ‘employability’ came from the critical realist ontological

focus on how the graduates had responded and interacted with the employability social structure. A methodology focused solely on the outcomes of the programme of change, either a statistical analysis, or indeed a Pawson and Tilley realist evaluation, would not have led to the practice enhancements discussed above.

6.2 CRITICAL REALISM AND EDUCATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Section 6.1 discussed how the critical realist approach adopted for my research has led to research-informed practice enhancements in my own practice setting. This section will consider the wider issue of what a critical realist approach offers to managers in education more generally.

As referred to previously in the very first paragraph of chapter 1 I made the point that in contrast to previous research I was approaching the issue of employability from the position of a senior manager looking to make practice enhancements. However, as noted later in the chapter, I initially did not approach the research from this perspective but tried to apply the familiar methods drawn from my discipline area of Economics. In other words I began by trying to build a model of employability which could then be tested and made generalizable rather than focusing on developing a research method that would actually address the need for practice enhancement. As a manager I need to understand not just the outcomes of any educational interventions but, and more importantly, how to improve the effectiveness of the interventions in achieving the outcomes. This is quite a different perspective from which to develop a research methodology than one focusing on theoretical development and/or exploratory application and testing.

In section 1.3 references was made to Timmins and Miller's view that

“Services such as education and health now require practitioners to be more accountable for what they do. Targets are set and evaluation will test whether they have been achieved ... practitioners are now extolled to ensure that their work is evidence-based ... but evidence is often highly context-related.”
(Timmins and Miller, 2007, p.9)

This quote emphasises two essential differences to research aimed at assessing education policy interventions from the perspective of a practicing manager. Firstly the recognition that the policy intervention has already happened, it's a 'social fact'

to use Pring's term (Pring, 2004), and needs to be judged against its original objectives. Secondly that the focus will be on an intervention within a specific educational context related to the manager's practice setting. In some senses these two elements of a performance target and a specific educational setting, at least initially, may constrain the breadth and purpose of the research. In line with my original research aim (section 1.4) the methodology based on critical realism developed in chapter 4 offers an approach to practitioner education management research which addresses these needs.

Section 4.2.1 introduced Pawson and Tilley's (1997) idea of a 'division of expertise' as a basis for exploring the nature of a programme of change/ educational intervention and its evaluation. The distinction made between subjects, practitioners and evaluators provides a useful frame of reference for the current discussion. As referred to previously for practitioner research the effectiveness of an education intervention needs to be judged against the original objectives set. The evaluator (who may or may not be the original practitioner) in assessing an educational intervention is considering the impact of a 'real' entity (the intervention) on a set of subjects.

The characterisation of the assessment of an education intervention as described above is essentially critical realist in nature. In critical realist terms the practitioner has introduced new opportunities and ideas into a pre-existing social structure thus creating new 'social facts' the impact of which need to be evaluated. In order for the practitioner to make practice enhancements though, and hence improve performance, they need to understand how the agents have interpreted and responded to the new 'social facts' of the educational intervention. As has been discussed previously this is one of the features which sets practitioner research apart from more exploratory types of research. The research approach developed in chapter 4, as shown by its application in chapter 5, offers a means for manager practitioners to develop research-informed enhancements based on experiences (or 'expertise') of the subjects of the educational intervention.

The other key aspect to recognise for manager practitioner research is the importance of context. As a manager I was only really interested in the effectiveness of the programme of change as it relates to my specific educational setting. As was

discussed in section 1.3 one of the cornerstones of critical realism is the recognition that social systems are open systems as opposed to the closed systems used, for example, by orthodox Economists (see section 2.2). Once this fact is accepted then in order to undertake any meaningful practice-based research a degree of closure needs to be brought to the system. From the manager's point of view the system needs to be closed as far as possible to allow for a focus to be put on the specific educational intervention of interest. This in effect is what I did in section 4.1.3 to enable me to focus the initial evaluation on successful FG and NFG graduates. Through this process of methodological closure the manager is able to contextualise their research to the specific intervention and educational setting of interest.

However what needs to be remembered is that the results from critical realist research are only valid for the specific educational context and, similarly, policy implementation and enhancements should also be context sensitive. In other words the manager needs to recognise that there exists a diversity of contexts and move away from one size fits all policy prescriptions (my initial approach to the Faculty's employability strategy being a case in point). Thus in my practice setting the findings reported in chapter 5 reflect the social reality created by the graduates who met the interview selection criteria. We cannot assume that graduates from other disciplines within the Faculty would reflect a similar view. Indeed one way in which the research could be developed would be to explore issues of employability with graduates from different disciplines. Would, for example, graduates from a directly vocational course such as Law manage and develop their employability differently than the Faculty's English graduates? Would graduates with 2.2 degrees have a less proactive approach to managing their employability than the graduates with good degrees included in the research?

The comments in the last paragraph would seem to be contradictory when set against the practice enhancements that have already been implemented and discussed in section 6.1. The practice enhancements described with the introduction of EPTs across the Faculty, for example, seems to be based on research evidence from only one context. However as was discussed in section 2.3 critical realist researchers need to be aware that one aspect of context is in fact the researchers "stock of conceptual resources" (Fleetwood, 2005). The way in which I have interpreted the research data will partly reflect my own 'conceptual resources', part of which is my own

experience as a senior manager within the Faculty. Many management decisions have a pragmatic element based on the manager's experience and local knowledge. The causes behind graduates ending up as frustrated careerists in the context of the research seemed, based on my own experience and informal discussions, to be true across the Faculty. Therefore you could argue that the changes I made in the practice setting were not so much 'evidence-based' as 'evidence-informed'. For the same reason all context specific practice enhancements should be regarded as 'evidence-informed' rather than 'evidence-based'.

Finally it is worth referring back to the nature of critical realist research discussed in section 1.3 (and also section 2.2). One of the key points to emerge from this discussion was that critical realism is essentially a philosophical view point rather than a specific research method. The point was illustrated by reference to the range and diversity of approaches taken by health policy researchers in undertaking realist evaluation. As defined by Lewis (2009) the start point for critical realist research is an observed phenomenon from which the researcher can take a multidisciplinary approach to construct an appropriate research methodology for analysing the phenomenon. Thus although the focal point of the research for a manager may revolve around an educational intervention in a specific practice setting, the actions of the agents being explored do relate to a wider social context which forms a theoretical social framework. The critical realist epistemological approach is therefore one of exploring phenomenon based on an ontology reflecting the agent's interaction with the social structure. As has been shown in this thesis exploring a phenomenon such as 'employability' from this critical realist view point can offer new insights into a phenomenon which has some direct relevance to practice enhancement.

Therefore the critical realist approach offers practitioner managers a flexible, context specific research approach which can be used to generate research informed practice enhancements.

6.3 SELF REFLECTION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Reflecting back on the whole research process from a personal perspective the most important developmental aspect was the shift to a qualitative research method as discussed previously. Although my critical realist view of the world did not change,

the decision to move to the use of semi-structured interviews did take me outside my comfort zone. Listening back to the recordings of the interviews it is clear from the early ones that I was not confident in my approach, even missing a key question in the interview with Beth. However as my confidence grew the interviews do begin to sound more like ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2006) rather than me asking a series of questions.

What also initially helped was the ability to follow the approach to realist evaluation adopted by health policy researchers and use previous research to develop a social structure for employability. As commented in section 1.3 having something which looked like a model underpinned by causal relationships, even if philosophically the nature of causality and research were unfamiliar, gave the research a comfortable feeling. However as the research developed I found the plurality offered by the critical realist method provided possibilities beyond the mere testing of the social structure. The issue of ‘success’ from the graduates’ perspective was addressed by a more inductive approach without the feeling that I needed to start with a set of comforting contingent relationships. Although I had the Tomlinson careerist/ ritualist concepts these were only a starting point and the final conclusions on the need for a finer division based on four categories emerged from the research.

Finally I would also contend that a critical realist approach is particularly useful to the practice-based research required on an EdD programme, not just for those concerned with looking for research-informed enhancements as discussed in section 6.2. My experience is that an EdD course attracts students from a wide range of discipline areas all of whom have an interest in a specific educational issue which may or may not be related to their discipline area. The earlier discussion on how critical realist research starts with a particular phenomenon of interest and effectively works back to a relevant discourse and research method seems ideally suited to the practice-based research required for an EdD thesis.

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APPENDIX 1

About the survey

The survey we are asking you to take part in is a national survey of everyone who has recently qualified from any university or HE college in the UK. The information you provide will also be very useful to us at [name of institution] to advise our current students about the opportunities that might be available to them.

Of those who obtained qualifications across the UK in 2005/06, 73.5% responded to the survey. Of these, 66.3% reported that they were working and a further 10.4% were working and studying. 13.2% were undertaking further study only. 5.1% of leavers were assumed to be unemployed. More results can be found at www.hesa.ac.uk/sfr112.

If we don't hear from you we will try to contact you again, possibly by phone, so please let us know if you change your address or phone number. If we can't get in touch with you at all, we may try to get information about what you were doing from someone else, either at the University or someone we can reach using the contact information you have previously provided. If you don't want us to do this, or you don't want to give us any information at all, please tell us. Below are details about what happens to your information after it is sent to us.

A follow-up survey is planned for three years time so that we can get even more information about the early careers of those with HE qualifications. You might be asked to take part in this follow-up survey as well, which will be carried out by a different organisation. The current survey may also be audited - that is, checked to make sure it has been carried out correctly. If you don't want to take part in the follow-up survey, or to be contacted during an audit, please let us know. You can also let us know that you do not want to take part in the follow-up survey by ticking the box at the end of the questionnaire.

What happens to your information

The information that you provide on this form will only be published by [name of institution] in a format that does not identify individuals, and will not be used by the University to inform staff, current and potential students of the employment outcomes of our students.

We will send coded information from this form to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). By returning this form, you are accepting that this will be linked to other information held about you as a student, including similar coded information you gave when you enrolled, and details of the qualification you gained. HESA will pass your record, or parts of it, to the following organisations that need the information to carry out their statutory functions connected with funding higher education.

- Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills (DIUS)

- Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)
- Scottish Executive (SE) [Scottish Government (SG)]
- Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL(NI))
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
- Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC)
- Training and Development Agency For Schools (TDA)
- Department of Health (DH)
- Research Councils (RCs)

HESA and the organisations listed above will use the information in your record mainly to produce statistics. This may result in information being published and released to other approved users, including academic researchers and commercial organisations. Your record will not be used in a way that could affect you personally. HESA and the organisations listed above will take precautions to reduce the risk of you being identified from the information once it is published and released.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, you have the right to a copy of the information HESA holds about you. You will have to pay a small fee for this. If you have any concerns about your information being used for these purposes, please contact HESA.

HESA
95 Promenade
Cheltenham
GL50 1HZ

Website: www.hesa.ac.uk

Area 1 – Background and biographical questions

- a. Which degree did you study
- b. What was the class of your degree
- c. Did you go straight to University after school/ college? (If *no* - what did you do between finishing school/ college and going to University)
- d. What were your entry qualifications for University
- e. Did either of your parents/ guardians go to University?
- f. Have any of your brothers or sisters been to University? (If *yes* - Before or after you?)
- g. Has anybody else in your close family been to University?
- h. What is your current job?
- i. Is this the first job you've had since graduating?

Area 2 – The influence of prior variables

Why did you decide to go to University?
Why did you choose X as your degree subject?
Was this the main reason for going to University? Did this influence your choice of degree subject?
What attracted you to this career or job? Did anybody influence you in choosing this – careers service at school, teachers, family, friends? *Probe for any role models that may have influenced choice*
If career/ job is different than originally intended/ Why did you not pursue your original career intention?
When you began your job search what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you would have to overcome? Did this prove to be the case?

Area 3 – The influence of mediating variables

. Thinking back to your time at University how helpful do you think the following were in helping you to secure your job (if not already referred to in answer to 5). For each one answered in the positive – what aspects were helpful? Why was it helpful? For each one answered in the negative – why did you not find this helpful?

- Your degree subject (if not already referred to)
- Your add+vantage modules
- The employability learning package (ELP)

The career development modules on your course

The University's careers service

Anything else connected with your time at University?

. What does your current job entail? Do you feel that your University experiences have provided a good preparation for the job? What else would you like to have seen the University provide for you by way of help? *Probe whether the softer employability skills are being used (team working, communication, presentation, leadership) and/or academic skills (analytical, critical)*

Area 4 – Additional aspects of graduate identity

What are you planning to do in the future? Are you undertaking any further studies? *Probe as to whether there is a future career plan in mind or not and whether steps are being taken to realise it.*

Area 5 – Self reflection by interviewee

Reflecting back on your success in the jobs market what advice would you give to students about to embark on their job search? What's the most important thing you have learnt about yourself during your job search?

Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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our degree subject				
Your degree class				
Your add+vantage modules				
The employability learning package (ELP)				
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The University's careers service				
Your family				
Personal contacts				
Others?				

APPENDIX 2

PEN PORTRAITS OF INTERVIEWEES

First Generation Graduates

Interviewee Anna

Personal details	White female aged 23
Degree details	First in Business Management, graduated in 2010
Current job	Graduate Teaching Assistant
Company	A Midlands University
Location	West Midlands

Anna is from North Warwickshire. She was taught at home and did not attend secondary school. Her first encounter with the formal education system was at 15 when she attended her local FE College to take GCSEs. These were completed in a year and she moved onto A-levels at the same college. She gained the equivalent of 300 UCAS points and initially went to a university in Wales to study linguistics. However she didn't like the university and switch to business management at the researcher's university after one term, as a February starter. Her aim had always been to go to University, but she wasn't clear what she would do after graduating. She graduated in 2010 with a first class degree in Business Management. She was recruited by her home University through internal advertisement as a graduate teaching assistant, a role she is still doing. She is currently taking an MSc in Logistics and a PG Cert in Education, both required as a condition of her post.

Interviewee Beth

Personal details	White female aged 23
Degree details	2:1 in Human Resource Management , graduated in 2009
Current job	HR/ payroll administrator
Company	Corporate head office of a national packaging company
Location	Coventry

Beth is from Oxfordshire. After completing GCSEs at school she went to her local FE College and completed a BTEC National Diploma in Business. She gained the equivalent of 320 UCAS points and entered the university on an academic scholarship. She only considered applying for University during her second year at College, prior to that her firm intention had been to find a job. She graduated in 2009 with a 2:1 degree in Human Resource Management. Her current post is the only one she has had since graduation and was gained through the company's normal application and selection procedures. The job was the only one she applied for on graduation. She is not currently taking the CIPD professional qualifications but feels this will be required by her company before much longer.

Interviewee Claire

Personal details	White female aged 24
Degree details	First in Marketing Management , graduated in 2009
Current job	Recruitment and admissions co-ordinator
Company	Midlands University
Location	West Midlands

Claire is from Leicestershire. After GCSEs she began A-levels at school but was ill for much of the first year and therefore transferred to her local college the following year and started again on a BTEC National Diploma course in Media. She gained the equivalent of 320 UCAS points. The idea of going to university only seems to have been considered by Claire once she started 6th form. She graduated in 2009 with a first in Marketing Management. She applied for three graduate jobs, the post she gained being her second interview. The job was at her home university but was gained through an external application process; however she had worked as a student ambassador so was known by her eventual employer. She has been promoted to a high grade since working for the university. She has just started her professional CIM marketing qualifications.

Interviewee Deepak

Personal details	British Asian male aged 2???
Degree details	First in Business Management , graduated in 2010
Current job	Customer Relations Co-ordinator
Company	A Regional Building Society
Location	West Midlands

Deepak is from North Coventry. GCSEs and A-levels were all completed at the same school and he gained the equivalent of 200 UCAS points. Deepak's long-standing ambition was always to join the Police; something he still maintains is his aim. He only considered applying for University during his second year at 6th form. He gained a first in Business Management in 2010. D has had to put his Police ambitions on hold as the next graduate intake will not be until 2013 at the earliest. He applied for a number of graduate trainee posts but eventually was taken on by a local building society for which he had been working part-time for during his time at University.

Interviewee Ed

Personal details	White male aged 28
Degree details	First in Business Management , graduated in 2010
Current job	Runs own business – describes himself as a 'Hospitality and Catering Professional'
Company	Catering and events organisation
Location	Northamptonshire

Ed is from Northamptonshire. He originally left school after GCSEs and trained as chef at his local college. He worked in the catering industry in the UK, New Zealand and Australia for seven years before deciding to go back into education and gained a place as a mature student on a Business Management degree. Entry was based on an interview and his extensive work experience. He graduated in 2010 with a first class degree. During his time at University he developed his own catering business on an ad hoc basis organising catering for events for private and corporate clients. Since graduating he has established his business as a limited company and is looking to develop the business on a more secure and sustainable footing.

Interviewee Frank

Personal details	White male aged 25
Degree details	2:1 in Business Management
Current job	Operations project co-ordinator
Company	Bed manufacturer
Location	Greater Manchester

Interviewee Frank is from Burnley in Lancashire. After school he went straight to his local college and completed an AVC double award in computing gaining about 200 UCAS points. He had always been set on going to University right through his secondary school and started a BA Business Computing course immediately after finishing his AVC. However after two years of Business Computing he was beginning to question his choice of degree as the business content was not as significant as he had been lead to believe at the start of the course. He took an unaccredited placement for a year after which he has a number of problems in rejoining his course. He switched to Business Management for the final and graduated with a 2:1 in 2009. F applied for a lot of jobs plus attended some assessment centres before finally being offered the job he currently has via a recruitment agency. The company is a bed manufacturer and has recently taken over another UK-based firm to become one of the biggest in Europe. Since taking the job he has had many areas of responsibility on the logistics side of the business particularly in relation to managing the transport delivery fleet. He is the first graduate to be taken on by the company in their logistics operations department.

Interviewee Gary

Personal details	White male aged 23
Degree details	First in Marketing Management , graduated in 2009
Current job	Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) manager for a
Company	Well know internet service provider
Location	Central London

Gray is from Gravesend in Kent where he attended Grammar School. He went straight from school to 6th form and on to University. He feels quite strongly that he was forced to do Maths, Physics, IT and Economics A-Levels by his parents, a combination he would not have chosen, and as a result under performed. His choice if degree course was his own and was unrelated to his A-levels. He graduated in 2009 with a first in Marketing Management and started work straight away as an SEO, a job he'd specifically targeted base previous work experience. He has moved company once since starting work but also does private consultancy work.

Non-first generation Graduates

Interviewee Rose

Personal details	White female aged 24
Degree details	First in Business Management , graduated in 2009
Current job	Creative Marketing Executive
Company	Corporate head office of a national ladies lingerie retailer
Location	Leamington Spa

Rose is from South Warwickshire. Both her father and grandfather went to University and completed degrees. She completed her GCSEs and A-levels at school. She gained the equivalent of 270 UCAS points. The unquestioned assumption throughout her school days had been that she would go to University. She graduated in 2009 with a first in Business Management. She had not applied for any graduate jobs whilst at University. She began working for her current employer immediately on graduation in an admin role on the recommendation of a family friend. She has since been promoted twice to her current role. She has no plans to take any further formal qualifications.

Interviewee Steve

Personal details	White male aged 25
Degree details	2:1 in Business and Accounting
Current job	Insolvency Marketing Assistant
Company	An Accounting firm
Location	Worcester

Steve is from Birmingham. His father has a degree in Engineering and his mother has an HND in Technical Drawing and structural engineering. He went straight from School to 6th form and took A-Levels in Maths, Physics, IT and Business, although he failed his Maths. He under performed in his A-Levels but managed to secure a place on a BA Business and Accounting degree, although his intention all through school had been to take pure Accountancy at University. The assumption had always been that he would go on to University. He took a placement year between years 2 and 3 and secured the placement through his own efforts. He now has a permanent post at his former placement employer and will move onto their trainee insolvency administrator programme next year.

Interviewee Tim

Personal details	White male aged 24
Degree details	First in Business Management , graduated in 2010
Current job	Graduate trainee - purchasing
Company	Luxury car manufacturer
Location	Cheshire

Tim is from Kenilworth in Warwickshire. His mother has a degree from Warwick and his father a degree from York St Johns. He went straight through school to 6th form and on to University, originally following on his father's footsteps to the York St Johns to take Business Management. The assumption all through school was that University was the eventual goal. However 3 did not take to St Johns and came home before the end of the first term. He quickly found a job in a local warehouse of a German firm who make high value seats for the motor industry. He decided to restart his degree again as a part-time student at his local University and was also at the same time put on the company's management training scheme. He completed two years as a part-time Business Management student but was finding it increasingly difficult to do both his job and degree so he gave up his job and became a full-time student. He graduated in 2010 with a First by which time he had already secured his graduate trainee post with a luxury motor company. During his final year he was applying for graduate trainee schemes and ended up with a choice between two.

Area 1 – Background and biographical questions

- j. Which degree did you study
- k. What was the class of your degree
- l. Did you go straight to University after school/ college? (If *no* - what did you do between finishing school/ college and going to University)
- m. What were your entry qualifications for University
- n. Did either of your parents/ guardians go to University?
- o. Have any of your brothers or sisters been to University? (If *yes* - Before or after you?)
- p. Has anybody else in your close family been to University?
- q. What is your current job?
- r. Is this the first job you've had since graduating?

Area 2 – The influence of prior variables

Why did you decide to go to University?
Why did you choose X as your degree subject?
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When you began your job search what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you would have to overcome? Did this prove to be the case?

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. Thinking back to your time at University how helpful do you think the following were in helping you to secure your job (if not already referred to in answer to 5). For each one answered in the positive – what aspects were helpful? Why was it helpful? For each one answered in the negative – why did you not find this helpful?

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Anything else connected with your time at University?

. What does your current job entail? Do you feel that your University experiences have provided a good preparation for the job? What else would you like to have seen the University provide for you by way of help? *Probe whether the softer employability skills are being used (team working, communication, presentation, leadership) and/or academic skills (analytical, critical)*

Area 4 – Additional aspects of graduate identity

What are you planning to do in the future? Are you undertaking any further studies? *Probe as to whether there is a future career plan in mind or not and whether steps are being taken to realise it.*

Area 5 – Self reflection by interviewee

Reflecting back on your success in the jobs market what advice would you give to students about to embark on their job search? What's the most important thing you have learnt about yourself during your job search?

Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

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Your family				
Personal contacts				
Others?				

APPENDIX 3

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : ROSE

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

1 – I did Business Management

PC – What class of degree?

1 – I came out with a first.

PC – Did you go straight to University after school?

1 – I did yes.

PC – and was it a college or a school you went to?

B – I did 6th form at my school

PC – Can you remember what your actual entry qualifications were?

1 – What was asked of me or what I got?

PC – What you got

1 – I got ABB and that was 270, I think

PC – Did either of your parents/ guardians go to University

1 – Yes, my Dad did

PC – Your Dad, and you said other people on your father's side as well

1 – He's got one brother who went and his Dad also went to University.

PC – Your Grandfather and your Uncle

1 - Yep

PC – Cousins?

1 – Three out of seven cousins have gone, three live in the US so it's sort of different over there and then just one over here who hasn't gone.

PC – Have you got any brother and sisters?

1 – I've got one sister and she hasn't gone to Uni

PC – What is your current job?

1 – I am creative marketing executive at XX which is a lingerie company based in Leamington and I basically manage the entire photography process within the company. The flip side is also that I do all the retail visual merchandising – everything in store that is visual falls under my role as well.

(Comment aside)

PC – Is it your first job since graduation?

1 – I've only been with XX since I graduated but it's actually my third role within the company.

PC – So what did you join as?

1 – I started literally the first day after my last exam just part-time in the customer services department, summer's the busiest time for the company and it was just an admin support role. Then after a few months of doing that they decided to make me permanent so they trained me up on the whole of the fitting service so that I could answer the calls to the customers. Then after a few months of doing that I moved into the marketing department just as an administrator so working for the entire department just again doing admin roles, and then I think July last year I managed to get the role I'm in now.

PC – How did you get the original job the day after your final exam?

1 – A friend's Mum works in the department and she knew that a few of us were about to finish Uni and wondered if we'd got any plans, and if we didn't did we fancy helping out.

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Why did you decide to go to University?

1 – (pause) I've never known what I wanted to do – I've never had a career aspiration and was really uncertain about which direction I wanted to go in. When I was at school the subject I enjoyed most was business studies, I liked how many varied parts there were to it and so I decided 'I'll go in that direction' because I figured it would still keep my options quite open and that's why I choose business management because it wasn't specialised in anything.

PC – So did you ever consider not going to University?

1 – No, not really, I didn't feel ready to just go into the working world, I didn't feel old enough – go and work for the rest of my life. I liked learning so I just wanted to learn for as long as I could while the opportunity was still really open to me.

PC – So all the way through school the assumption was that you would go to University, it was never a conscious decisions that 'I'll go to University rather than get a job' or

1 – No, it was never – we just didn't really talk about it that much. I guess in my head I knew that was the direction I would end up going in and school was quite directional in making you make that choice – kind of year 10 and 11 'right you need to think about what you want to be doing' and then when you got into 6th form they were really on your case – 'you've come this far, you've done well enough to get this far, why not better yourself by going to University'. They were quite passionate about getting as many students there as possible.

PC – The choice of business management was simply because that was what you enjoyed doing

1 – Yes, I enjoyed the subject and I didn't actually know what I wanted to do.

PC – You didn't consider doing something more creative given where you've ended up?

1 – Even in my degree I did nothing to do with Marketing. I did the module that I had to do, the one that's build into the final year. But when I got into the final year when you could choose the modules you wanted to do I did not choose marketing it was the one I was least interested in (laughs).

PC – So the of business management came from ... were there any other influences on choosing that, your parents for instance?

1 – I think my parents knew that I enjoyed the subject and had a really good teachers at school who I have a really good relationship with – I always enjoyed going to their lessons and if ever I had free time I'd spend it in their classroom working hardest on my coursework. My parents just know that I enjoyed that so wanted to kind of supported me in what I enjoyed doing – it was never 'I'm not sure that's right for you I want you to do Maths or English' it was more of 'well if that's what you enjoy then go for it'.

PC – So when you started your degree you had no idea what you wanted to do at the end?

1 – No, absolutely no idea. I thought I would go maybe more down the logistics point-of-view

PC – Any reason why because that is often the least obvious....

1 – The fact that it makes sense and I like processes and I like a bit of structure and working towards an end goal.

PC – Did you use the careers service at school at all?

1 – I used it once and it was horrendous so I didn't use it again. I had one interview with them – I don't remember a lot of it – I knew I said I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life basically, and they said, well you need to think about it. Well I said 'I have been thinking about it, I'm 15, I think there's still time' and they said 'well what do you enjoy' and at the time I was doing a lot of dancing just in my spare time and I told them that I enjoyed that and I said that I wouldn't want to do that as a career, I'll just do that in my spare time and their answer was 'right she doesn't know what she wants to do, she enjoys dancing – basically I'm not good enough and cannot take that any further in career' – and that was it. I didn't know what I wanted to do and they didn't have any options for me.

PC – So where you've ended up now is simply, you did your degree, didn't know what you wanted to do at the end, and this job opportunity arose so...

1 – So it's just carried me on really.

PC - So you never set out with the intention of becoming a marketing ...

1 - ... absolutely not. If you'd have asked me when I was in my final year at Uni what I wanted to do I'd have probably 'oh, I don't know' and if someone had said to me that in two years time you're going to have done three different jobs and you're going to end up in marketing I'd have probably laughed at them. I'd never have thought I'd be in this.

PC - Were you actually applying for jobs when you were still a student

1 - No

PC - You didn't at all?

1 - No, I didn't apply for any. I looked at applying for 'graduate schemes' and all that sort of thing - but I never actively applied for jobs.

PC - Any reason for that?

1 - (pause) No I don't think so. I just wanted to get all my exams and all my coursework out of the way and that was my main focus and I thought actually I've got the summer and I was going to treat the summer like I had for the rest of my school years and was, you know, going to take it easy, find a bit of a part-time job, then spend time applying but I just wanted to do as well as I could in my exams.

PC - Just thinking back ...if you had gone through trying to applying for jobs in your final year what do you think the biggest hurdle would have been?

1 - I think it's just the time. I think you want to make yourself appear as good as possible on paper and in order to do that you have to put the time into your applications - you know adjusting your CV make to fit the role you're going for and it just takes so much time. I would have rather focused on getting the degree so that I could then hopefully do better in my future career than potentially jeopardising it by focusing on jobs too early.

AREA 3 - THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC - Just thinking about your time at University, now 18 months ago, I'm just going to go through a list these things and I'd be interested to know how helpful they've been in actually getting the job that you've got now.

PC - Your **degree subject**

1 - I do think it's been helpful, definitely because it's given me a really wide eye on how businesses work and how each department gels with each other in order to make the company run as smooth as possible. The fact I didn't choose to do Marketing, it hasn't yet hindered me - touch wood

PC - Do you think that having a business management degree was in your favour when you were going for these jobs further up the company, was that a factor?

1 - I don't think it was at the entry level when I came in - whether it has in the other ones? I hope it's helped but I've never had the feedback 'oh we're really glad that you've got a degree' I just don't know.

PC - And the fact that you've got a first hasn't made any difference

1 - No one's mentioned anything, no

PC - Your **add+vantage** modules?

1 - I can't remember what I did now. The one I did my first year I don't think did (PC - which one was that) the five life skills - not sure if it's still going? That was about time management and stress management I cannot remember anything at all that I learnt in that. But my other two I felt personally helped me, whether they helped me with my job directly. I did an introduction to VBA ...

PC - VBA?

1 - 'Visual basic application' basically excel and then the other one I did was advanced VBA, just the next stage on from that, so that to me just really widened my knowledge in Excel, massively. I use Excel every single day at work - I can put spreadsheets together much quicker than a lot of people can just 'cause I have that extra knowledge of it.

PC - and you wouldn't have got that from your main business course?

1 - No not at all. Just simple things like making dropdown lists and making your formulas as clear as possible really, really does help in everyday working on Excel. I was really grateful to myself that I'd picked those ones.

PC - Employability Learning Package?

1 – (laughs) absolutely nothing! I never used that.

PC - Career development modules on your course?

1 – (pause) I think they were. Because I wouldn't have had my linkedin network if I hadn't have done it in Uni 'cause I wouldn't have known anything about it. My CVs wouldn't be probably as up to scratch as they are and having learnt them, I did mine with XX, I helped my Dad improve his, my sister improve hers. I've just looked at peoples and I've known 'that's not right and it's not clear, why aren't you pulling this out, you're really good at this'. I really feel that it's helped me have a better knowledge of what other people are looking for. Yeah definitely.

PC – is that something you've realised since, or is it something you realised at the time?

1 – No I realised at the time, because I set my CV up within those modules and I made sure that anything I did I was keeping them up to date, which was something XX advised us to do and then during that, my sister is always job hunting and she sat down and said 'oh I don't know what's going wrong' and I said 'do you want me to take a look at your CV' and I did and I said 'right let's use mine as a basis and set it out better'

PC - University careers service

1 – (pause) I don't think I used it. I may have had a meeting, but I didn't actively use it.

PC – Anything else connected with your time at University?

1 – (pause) I think just general working of university – having to work with people you don't know and, you know, stupid things like trying to set up meetings with people. At uni you don't really realise it's happening that's what you're doing until your working life and you think 'yep, I know how to do this' and I know how to manage people a bit better as well.

PC – so you didn't do any work experience modules at all?

1- No.

PC – did you work at all while you were at University?

1- Yeah I've always had some sort of job on the go. I worked for quite a while at the ambulance service in their control room for all the non emergency vehicles. I did that to keep me going. I worked at a social club behind the bar which I'm still doing. I think they were my two main jobs, but yeah I always had something going on.

PC – Did you use those experiences when you were applying for these particular jobs – did you draw on them?

1 – Yeah partly, especially the ambulance...

PC – How did you get that job as a student?

1 – My boyfriend's Mum worked there so I managed somehow again to get it. I think I started it in the holidays, she got me trained up and I managed to keep it either as an evening shift or a Saturday shift.

PC – so it was family connections like the job you end up with ...

1 – Yeah, what am I like at networking! (laughs)

PC – Generally looking back on the degree that you did do you think that the general University experiences was actually good preparation for your job?

1 – Definitely (pause)

PC – In what way? You've mentioned some of the academic stuff, what about the softer stuff –things like presentation, communication

1- I mean your communication ... how to say it? Like your presentation you use that in your interview, it's building a kind of persona you may not necessarily use every day but when you go into an interview situation you have to step up and you have to really present yourself as being the best, so having a lot of practice of that throughout uni has definitely helped.

PC – Group work?

1 – Yeah. I mean I don't think I'd necessarily draw upon it exactly because of the department I'm working, we actually work as a team but each person has their own roles to do so you're not working constantly 'right, you know, I'll go off and do this and then we'll come back together and see where we've got to', it's kind of a constant individual piece of work really.

PC – Anything that you would like to have done at University – anything missing that might have helped you get a job

1 – Not that I can think of. Nooo - I don't think so. I mean one day I may come back and do an MA or something, but at the moment it's not something I feel is particularly necessary where I am, but I guess that's something I'll find out in the future really.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – You're not doing any further course or studies at the moment?

1 – No. I have been looking into doing possibly doing some digital marketing courses, just kind of teach myself and do a bit more of it, but that's just a personal interest, I haven't properly looked into it yet.

PC – so there's no expectation in XX that you need to develop anymore

1 – Absolutely not. I think that because of where I've come in at they can see that I'm still willing to learn, I'm very new to it so they can kind of teach me – teaching me their way in order to work as proactively as I can for them

PC – You've got this job now – any future plans, how do you see your career developing?

1- Well if it moves as quickly as the last 18 months have it, I could end up anywhere! I still don't think that the role that I'm in is my career – it's not my lifelong career. I've always felt that I'm the least creative person that I know and yet in my job title I now have 'creative' but I've made the company aware of it, they know that I prefer a slightly more structured way of working. I like being able to do a job and seeing the results from it whereas when you're creative you're just kind of guessing whether you've got it right or not

PC – so would you like your career to go then – where's this 'structured role', what do you see yourself doing?

1 – That's one reason why I'm looking into digital Marketing. I enjoy the Marketing aspect but I think with digital you can create something, put it out there and immediately see your click results, you can see your sales, you can immediately see whether adding that advert on that website whether it was successful and whether you will do it in the future, whether making your page purple rather than yellow grabs your customer's attention more, you can see it immediately and I just like that kind of reassurance really that you know you're doing it right whereas at the moment it's all personal opinion – you can please people but you don't whether you're actually creating decent results from that all the time

PC – But you do see yourself staying in Marketing?

1 – For the time being (laughs). I'm enjoying the marketing experience. Again I don't know, I still don't know what I really want to do in my career. I know I enjoy business and I enjoy the fast pace of it all

PC – What about running your own business, is that something you could see yourself doing?

1- Yeah, I could see myself doing it, it's just a question of what I would have a business in don't see myself as an entrepreneur (*next section edited to preserve company anonymity*)... and we've now just launched the clothing side of things, actually launched two days ago. We've been doing clothing for a while but under XX but we decided a couple of years ago to split the two brands, so we've now got the lingerie side of things which is XX and the clothing side of things which is YY. So we've launched a couple of new YY stores and we've now dual branded a lot of our stores ...

PC – So what are YY aimed at the, same customer base?

1 – Same customer, slightly more fashion focused rather than functionality (*next section edited out to preserve company anonymity*)

PC – Just thinking back on your experience, your journey – from where you are now, if you were asked to come back in and talk to a group of our second year/ final year students what advice would you give them about how to get them graduate level job?

1 – (pause) I would say be confident in what you feel you are good at, if you've got an area that you enjoy, go with it, network as much possible because you never know what your contacts can do for you, even if it's the least expected person in the world there still might be something there. I think just being able to prove that you're better than the next person, just really being able to show your strengths is such an important asset to be able to do.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – What do you think you've learnt about yourself this process, though this journey you've been through to where you are now?

1 – I still don't know what I want to do (laugh). I'm kind of content in that now, I'm not worried about it, it doesn't panic me that I don't know what I'll be doing in 10 years time, happy to go with the flow and just take as much from each experience as I can so that it can help me build me, build up my CV, build up my personality. You know everything that I do I can just put in

the book and say that I've done it, whether I want to repeat it or not that's kind of up to me then. I just like having experiences, I just still like learning things and I'm just taking on as much as I can all the time

PC - Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	4
1- I'd say 4, but that's more for my benefit because that gave me confidence that I knew I was good	
Your add+vantage modules	3
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
The career development modules on your course	¾
The University's careers service	1
Your family	3
PC – why a 3?	
1- Just 'cause they left me to it. I literally come home and say 'oh I've applied for a job' so they'd support me in that, but they would never try and sway my decision in doing it – just kind of help me with the end decision that I made	
Personal contacts	4
1- Massively !!	
PC – Just thinking about that a bit more. You've spoken about the family friend who got you into where you are now, your boyfriend's mother who got you the job at the ambulance service – any other personal contacts who...	
1 – Well to get the job at the social club behind the bar my boyfriend was already working there. Erm where else have I worked? I even had a job when I was 12 working in a greengrocers and I even got that through someone I went to brownies and guides with. Basically every job I've ever had is because I know somebody working there. I used to work in a clothes shop called 'Pilot' and I got that through school because we did a fashion show for their shop – so I managed to get a contact through that. So everything ... I've always been quite lucky through who I've know really.	

PC – anything else that has had an

impact on where you are now

1 – Colleagues at work have been important in working my way up through the ladder. When I was on customer services the job as marketing administrators came up there was someone I was working quite closely with and it was literally in meeting when the job advert came up and she looked at me and said 'go for it' and I was like 'what do you mean go for it, it's in marketing' she said 'oh go for it I think you'd be brilliant'. If hadn't said anything I probably wouldn't have done, but it was here saying 'I think you could do that'. Then doing well in that role, when this other role came up that was because my manager who is now, said 'there is this role coming up I'd love you to go for it' and again I may not have had the confidence of doing that without someone saying 'you know what, you can do it'. So yeah definitely people at work have been massively supportive.

PC – OK good, thank you.

1 – No problem.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : STEVE

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

2 – BA Business and Accounting

PC – What class of degree did you get?

2 – 2:1

PC – Did you go to University straight after school?

2 – Yes – I went to 6th form and then straight to Uni

PC – What did you do a 6th form?

2 – A-levels in Business, IT, Physics and Maths, however I failed Maths

PC – But you passed the Physics

2 – Just

PC – What sort of grades did you get – what were your UCAS entry points?

2 – They were very low actually. I got C, D, E so that's 60 I was under the University level and went in through clearing. I think I got 200 UCAS points – Oh, general studies as well, but that's not really a subject (laughs)

PC – Yeah 200 sounds about right. And one of your parent's one did a degree...

2 – Yes in Engineering and my Mum did a HND in Technical Drawing with structural Engineering on the side

PC – So you come from an engineering sort of background

2 – Not really, they both work in housing – so they did that and then they both went into the housing for Birmingham City Council in the housing department.

PC – Any brother or sisters?

2 – Yes I've got a sister – she's younger and she's at Nottingham Trent Uni

PC – Anyone else in your close family been to university - aunts, uncles, cousins,

2 – My cousins are all at Uni. My close cousin he's at Sheffield doing Chemistry and my younger cousin about to go to Sheffield to do Chemistry as well.

PC – What is your current job?

2 – It's technically called an 'insolvency marketing assistant'. So it involves marketing and getting insolvency jobs in for the firm from accountants, lawyers, local authorities etc.

PC – Is it your first job since graduation?

2 – Yes

PC – Did you graduate last year?

2 – Yes, 2010

(comments aside)

2 – Although the job is called marketing it's not really marketing as you'd do at Uni it's more actually meeting people, networking rather than ... even though it says marketing in the title I won't say it's drawing, poster design or anything like that (PC – more relationship marketing ..) Yeah , yeah rather than actual marketing.

PC – Did you do marketing as part of the business part of your degree?

2 – No, no. 'Cause when I applied for the placement XX (*company name*) as a company area accountants and obviously insolvency is just a small part of that, so I just sent them a letter saying 'can I have a job, can I have a placement year' and I found it interesting and I stuck with it. Next year I'll be going on to be a trainee insolvency administrator which will actually be dealing with the day-to-day administration of a case. So settling the bankruptcy, selling the assets, dealing with any money any transactions ... that kind of ... dealing with the affairs of an insolvency.

PC – Did they take you on specifically because that's what they had in mind for you to do?

2 - Yes

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Just going back to when you were in the 6th form why did you decide to go to University?

2 – I think it was because it was the natural progression, you were almost assumed you were going to University, you had lessons on your personal statement, it was kind of ... I thought 'Oh yeah we're going to have to go to University'. Originally it was assumed that you were going to have to go so you did all the work to apply through UCAS.

PC – So it was always your intention, it never occurred to you not to go?

2 – I originally thought to look to do a placement year before Uni and I did go to a company in Birmingham who were sorting all that out but then they couldn't find me one or I didn't get one so I just went straight to Uni in the end

PC – But the intention was always that you would go straight to University. Was that from right back in your school?

2 – No, not really, probably secondary school. You see people go off to Uni and it's just one of those things that you thought 'Yeah...'

PC – and your family expected it ?

2 – Yeah. It was one of those where it was just natural progression

PC - So why did you choose Business and Accounting?

2 – Because I enjoy working with figures and I enjoyed the accounting from doing business studies at school, I enjoyed the accounting side of it, from what I learnt. But I also enjoyed the business side and learning how businesses work etc so I thought 'well instead of doing pure accounting it would be the best option to do a mixture of both' and then at the end you got a mixed bag of skills rather than just one in accounting.

PC – So was the intention always actually to go into accounting? Was that the career aim?

2 – Not when I was younger. When I was say year 10/ year 11 I was possibly looking at doing like environmental health that kind ... I don't know if that was just a phase but I've always liked numbers. I've always been into maths – solving problems – so that why accounting was always

PC – So when you were looking into what to do at Uni you had accounting...

2 – It was always going to be something around the accounting field...

PC – ... and you saw that as being what your career would end up in

2 – There was never 'oh I could possibly do that' it was always ... accounting was the main field.

PC – and it was just because you were good at numbers? Have you got any accountants in your family, for instance?

2 – No, no accountants

PC – Any other sorts of influences on choosing that particular subject any one at school, family friends...?

2 – Not really. My dad's quite high up in the council so he's always been at manager level so he's always had that. And my Mum and Dad has office based jobs, so I don't know it have been that influence that they were office based rather than practical, hands-on. So that probably had an influence on what I had.

PC – No influence from school, teacher ...

2 – No, not really, no. Some of the teachers, like my business studies teacher at A-level was always good and obviously kept you in touch in the subject which obviously then helped you. So the business studies teacher at A-level was quite – well you always enjoyed going to that lesson.

PC – Just thinking back to what you wanted to do when you finished University, and you were thinking about getting a graduate level job at that point what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you were going to have?

2 – (pause) ... my A-level results. That was one of the biggest hurdles. Because I hadn't got great A-level results when I was looking at doing all the Chartered Accountant exams they all look on your A-level results. They obviously want to know that you've got a 2:1 at degree level but it's the Chartered Accountants qualifications there's all the stats where if you've got certain amount in your UCAS points you'll pass the Chartered Accountants in, if not you won't. So that was always ... at one point I did consider doing an extra A-level to bump up my points 'cause that was always my biggest concern

PC- Did it prove to be a problem in the end?

2 – Not with this job because I'm not going to do the Chartered Accountant qualifications anymore at the moment but yeah when I was looking around and applying on-line and stuff – sometimes they ask you, when they ask you for your UCAS points and as soon as you tell them you've got below their required standard you have to put a reason why and then they supposedly review it but ...

PC – Where you applying for similar sort of jobs accounting jobs ...

2 – Yeah, accounting jobs the big four really and all the slightly lower ones just as trainee accountant on a proper graduate scheme.

PC – Did you get any interviews?

2 – No, none at all, Because I'd had ... I already knew about this job I didn't try as hard as I could of because I knew I'd got this as basically a fallback I thought I'd better apply other places just in case.

PC – So how did you get this job?

2 – I did a placement year here between my second and third year and I just mentioned to the Director and stuff that I fancied coming back and he said 'well we'll have look at it, I obviously can't promise you' and then we discussed it. 'Cause they weren't allowed to recruit I've had to come back as doing half of what I was doing on placement year, half of something else so they can keep the numbers in the office the same but recruiting me.

PC – So how did you get the placement in the first place?

2 - I just sent out a letters to ... I looked at, the top 50 accountants in the country, sussed out which ones are local to Birmingham – Worcester was a bit of a stretch but I'll send one anyway and got it through that sort of thing. But it was more for a general accounting qualification, I was looking at doing pure accountancy. When I sent it here obviously we don't do accounting in this office, and then went into insolvency and found that interesting.

PC – So you're not from Worcester?

2 – No I'm from Birmingham.

PC – So it was simply a matter of writing a load of letters and one of them got back to you and said...

2 – Yeah, a few of them said 'Oh we're possibly looking we'll let you know' but XX got back to me straight away saying 'let's have you in for an interview, it's not pure accounting but you might find it interesting'

PC – Were you sending CVs with these letters? (2 – Yes) And this was all done off your own back? (2 - yes). You got no help from the Department (2 – no) ...

2 – I think it was mentioned 'you should do a placement year' but that was before all the EPU was around and everything. That was a small little office which I didn't know about. So it was just literally of my own back thinking.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – What year did you actually start your degree – it would have been 2006 (2 – Yes)

PC – What I'm interested in, I'm going to go through a list these things here, the impact you think each of these had on you getting this post here or the graduate post you're going have when they do that.

PC – Your **degree subject**, the fact that it was Business and Accounting was that important?

2 - Yes, because in the job you need a basic accounting background, because even though it's insolvency your still looking at Sage accounts, your still printing off 10/15 company accounts from Companies House every day and looking at them. So you need to know and if you did have an accounting background you would probably – it would. It was very important

PC – What about the fact that it was a 2:1 degree that you got, was that important in getting the job?

2 – Not really because it was almost a given. So it wasn't an essential but obviously it looks better

PC – Now what about your **add+vantage modules**? Which ones did you do?

2 – First year I did 'leadership', second year I did 'Introduction to Excel' third year I did the 'post-placement perspectives' module.

PC – And how useful were those?

2 – Leadership was a complete waste of time – it was quite difficult and I don't think I got anything out of it. The Excel one was brilliant, still use some of the stuff I learnt then now and the post-placement perspectives was good but it just followed my placement, quite an easy one to get you back into Uni life as well because it was based on the whole year you've just spent out on placement.

PC – So you found the Excel one useful, but did any of them actually impact on you getting the job?

2- No, however I would have felt that if you were going for a pure accountancy job there was the Sage ones. I did Sage as part of one of my modules in the second year, 284/286 something like that, so I learnt a bit about that when I applied for the job here, as I've got a bit of basic Sage knowledge and that was when I was told that 'well we're not pure accounting so you won't need it that much', but it we ever have to log onto a Sage system I know roughly... So it's not essential but it has helped.

PC – I can see that the spreadsheet skills will help as well

2- They definitely. In the third year there was quite a few that I could have chosen 'cause of the second Excel one, but I just felt that the placement one was ideal. Yeah the Excel one was definitely

PC – What about the **Employability Learning Package – ELP**?

2- Personally didn't enjoy it, waste of time. Because I didn't learn from it, I didn't get anything out of it, but I've never been a blogger or I've never been that kind of person, my English isn't – my spelling – isn't the best, I've never been that brilliant at English. I almost didn't see the point of it really... and I haven't shown any employers

(Comments aside)

PC – Now on the degree its self there was some **career development** modules, skills modules, personal development modules (2 – Yeah). Were they of any use in you getting this job at the end of your degree, or getting your sandwich year?

2 – No, no. I saw those as a bit of a waste of time – I didn't get much out of them. The research methods one was quite good for my dissertation wise, but for the job it hasn't....

PC – Was there any section there about CV writing, did they get alumni back in to talk to you?

2 - No

PC – It was more course-focused

2 – Yeah course focused, and that's possibly what I would have preferred a bit more CV writing... like in the second year you should be looking for placements, cover letter writing that kind of ... but it was more very course-focused with research methods and all that. So it wasn't very important.

PC – What about the **University careers service**?

2 – Didn't use it

PC – Didn't use it at all? (2 – No) Any particular reason?

2 – Didn't know about it.

PC – OK fair enough

I learnt, because I worked at the EPU as a receptionist in the third year, I learnt a hell of a lot there about what the Uni offer, but I never knew about things like that. The other thing was because I was living at home and travelling in everyday you're not on campus in the sense that you're not around wander past it with your mates sort of thing – your there for Uni than you go home sort of thing.

PC – Anything else about your time at University which helped you get this post, get to where you are now?

2 – Definitely the placement (long pause). In a sense some the lecturers, like XX (Dept employability tutor named). It just helped because you could always go and have a chat to them and they talked to you about real life situations and how it was – 'cause XX was my placement tutor as well. So I'd chat to XX and he's been in touch since just to see how I was getting on

PC – Do you think that what you did at University was actually good preparation for this job?

2 – (Pause) Yes and no.

PC – Go on then, why yes?

2 – Yes because you get to see, for an accountant, you get to see accounts and the basics of the T accounts you learn the core basics of what accounting is and you learn where it's all come from. But at the same time there the thing about real life that you pick up a lot more when you're working with the real accounts. When I was looking at accounts at Uni it was all standard 'this is what they look like'

PC – So what was the real life factors then ...

2 – Well every set of accounts is completely different: people account for different things in different ways; depending on which accountant has drawn them up they all look completely different. ... and its little things – through the course I used to get debits and credits confused being on placement year you just pick it up and obviously you train for a graduate job then you just pick it up. We still talk about T accounts, not that anyone used them anymore and then obviously the Sage stuff that's helped. The management stuff, business and management, not really much use.

PC – What about some of the softer skills like team working, presentations?

2- Yes. Team working definitely because a few of the coursework's you don't like the teams you're put into but you have to work with them and that's real life. Presentations. I'm not very good at presentations, I never will be, but it's that bit of confidence of standing up in front of the class. You don't have a choice you've got to do it to pass your module. So you're almost forced to do it but that makes you want to do it and that makes you slightly better.

PC – You're finding those useful in the role (2 – Yes) but were they actually a factor in getting the job do you think? Did you have to do a presentation as part of your interview?

2- No, but then it's the confidence factor of walking to someone you don't know, 'cause at Uni you have to talk to people in your class you don't know. So it's that confidence factor I've learnt from talking to people in groups that helped me talk to people because here you talk to people from lower levels up to Director level, up to the Chairman in London. SO you talk to all that level of people obviously Uni has taught me that you can talk to anyone and your just a human being.

PC – You worked as a receptionist on the EPU (2 – Yes), in your final year, (2 – Yes) , how did you find that?

2 – Brilliant

PC – That must have given you some skills as well?

2 – Definitely, definitely. First of all I learnt what the Uni could offer: talking to students coming on, passing on advice; skills, obviously just talking, presentations, and just how the Uni works. YY (*EPU manager named*) was always good fun to work with (laughs). The EPU is a brilliant service that the students didn't know about but I was able to pass on what I'd learnt on my placement year to them (*Comments aside*)

PC – What are you planning to do then? You said you've got this role at the moment which is a stop gap at the moment before you actually start the proper graduate job. Have you got any long term career aims?

2- Well at the moment they've put me on an introduction to insolvency course which is basically a 10 month course – once a month – just to go through the basics all types of insolvency

PC – So there's a professional body?

2 – Yeah there's R3r's insolvency. Each insolvency practitioner gets their license from there like the ICAW, but then there is R3 which is the board which is the overall reign which can bring down legislation, practice notes etc. I'm on one of their courses at the moment and then there's a certificate in proficiency in insolvency which I'm going to do in a couple of years time, and then there's your joint insolvency examination board which you get a good couple of months off work study leave and that's when you pass them that's it you can apply for your license and you can become your own insolvency practitioner.

PC – So that's your aim is it?

2 – That's my aim, five or six year's time I reckon. It's a lot of work, there's 3 exams and a couple here in the office have failed three and passed the one – it's a lot of work

PC – Presumably there's quite a strong legal side to it as well?

2 – Yes, you got to learn case law ...

PC – and keep up to date with it (2 – Yes). The company's actively supporting you

2 – Yes definitely. Every year the Director tries to put ... or every other year but it's a lot of cost to him 'cause obviously it's a couple of months out and that's charged to the team and all that. But yeah the firm are definitely ... it's one of things that was mentioned at the interview that that's what I wanted to do and I said 'Yeah, not a problem'.

PC – So when you qualify as a consultant will you still work for a company is it like lawyers who when they become solicitors actually ...

2 – Yes. The way you would ... train as a insolvency practitioner, you get your insolvency practitioner license and then you can either move out and work on your own or you just stay within the firm and then you can have appointments in your own name. But it's more the fact of having done the exams then you can apply for your licence that actually having your licence because XX (company name) will only give you a licence if you are a director 'cause it's all you personal insurance so we've got four licence holders in the office – well four people who could apply for a licence but only one of the actually takes appointments, but it's the fact that you've got it – you've got it for life then, and then you can do what you want.

PC – It is like lawyers, 'cause once they qualify they might act independently but may be part of a bigger group

2 – So here in Worcester my director YY is the office holder who's got the licence everything goes through him, all the appointments are in his name, he has to sign off the paperwork but he doesn't actually have much to do with the cases – they get passed around the office but its ... he's got all his liabilities and he has to insure things and

PC – I suppose business is good?

2 – Not as busy as it could be, but we've picked up a few big jobs recently

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – Just reflecting back to say the EPU contacted you and said 'come and talk to some of our final year students' what advice would you actually give to those students who were about to start looking from jobs?

2 – Don't go for a certain job, keep your options open, you never know what might interest you. If you do marketing don't just go for the marketing job go for the whole range, you can always turn them down at the end of the day. Keep all your options open, and just apply everywhere, what have you got to lose at the end of the day, it's the price of a stamp or time on-line.

PC – Why do you think you didn't get any other interviews ... looking back?

2 – (pause) I think ... first of all I'd didn't apply to that many so there was always – about 10 or so – there wasn't that many. Second one was A-level results because they were that bad, well they weren't that bad but they weren't what I wanted. And obviously I didn't come across that well in the ... 'cause they were all most of them an hour 'give us 200 words on x,y or z' sort of thing.

PC – That's quite an art form to be able to do that and set yourself apart

2 – Yeah. And that's something that the students almost need to learn. 'Cause it's something I need to learn – I'm crap at describing myself. But it's that kind of thing – you need to learn in 200 words 'why have you done this' and you need to be able to promote yourself and not be scared to across almost bigheaded 'cause that's what people want

PC – OK. So that's something that you think was missing?

2 – Yeah.

PC – Anything else that you think was missing? (2 – errhm) Anything else that would have helped you?

2 – I don't think there was that much careers talk in a sense. Speaking to friends at different Unis' they always had modules on CV writing and they always used to moan about it, but the fact that you've got a module on career, talking about where you can go with your career CV writing, cover letter writing, applying for jobs, that kind of thing. Yeah everyone's going to find it boring but it's something actually real and quite useful.

PC – I have to say the reason I've left the Accounting and Finance courses to the end to trawl through is that I know that the career development modules on those course are not ... 'cause on the other business courses that's exactly what they do, what you've just described. It is changing on Accounting and Finance I can assure you.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC - What's the most important thing you've learnt about yourself in this process?

2 – (Long pause)

PC – Self reflection, it's not easy is it! (Laughs). How are you different now from what you were four or five years ago?

2 – I'm a lot more confident now. I can meet anyone one my own or with people and be confident 'cause sometimes people are confrontational in this kind of job. I'm now able to play it cool, not get up-tight about it and almost realise that that is the job and you walk away from it, it's not your problem in a sense. So definitely more confident and speaking to people ... you can speak to anyone and it doesn't matter if they don't know who you are, you can pick up the phone to anyone and my communication, like my written communication skills are a lot better even writing the graduate jobs on email, and tailoring it to the right needs. Sometimes you've got to be a bit friendly and then sometimes you've got to be completely straight and its knowing how to do that and to who you can do that to.

PC – There the sort of things that can't be taught, it is simply experience.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – I've just got a simple Likert scale here just to get some numeric figures on this. So assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	1
Your add+vantage modules	2
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
The career development modules on your course	2
The University's careers service	1
Your family	3
PC – What impact have they had?	
2 – Well they've always been supportive and they always given me ... they	

were willing to help. Sit down – the amount of times I went through my courseworks with my Dad that kind of ... and the dissertation and that so they've always been supportive. They'll support me in whatever I do.	
Personal contacts PC – Why do you say that? 2 – 'Cause being offered the job here – because I'm good friends with the manager, through the job, we get on really well so it was obviously personal impact from him that put in a good word for me to get the job back as a graduate job	4

PC – Any other factors which have impacted on getting this job?

2 – (long pause) No I cannot think of anything.

PC – OK that's it. Thanks you very much

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : TIM

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS & AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Can you just confirm what your degree of study was?

3 – Business Management, BA Honours

PC – and what class of degree

3 – My result? First class Honours

PC – Did you go straight to University from school or college?

3 – I did, but I left. I went to York St Johns University just to do Business Management in Sept/ Oct normal term time start. I got there and realise that I'd gone there on the grounds of what teachers and parents and other people had influenced me to do, not for my own benefit – I didn't realise that at the time so I left and came back by Xmas and got myself a full-time job where I'd previously worked part-time.

PC – Why was the influence to go to York St Johns?

3 – Just 'cause I love York. York was a place I wanted to go – I love the place. Business Management was what ... I knew I wanted to do a business related degree. To be honest it was a selfish ... it was more a choice of ... like I said my head wasn't really in the decision that much, rather than looking through who was going to offer me the best degree to fit what I wanted to do with my career I looked at where was going to be the best place to fit with my with ... somewhere I'd like to go so I went with that. Lovely place but ...

PC – I love York so I can understand that!

3 – It was a decision that was influenced heavily by what other people, I think, thought was best for me and it wasn't till I got there and I realised it was all done in a bit of a whirlwind.

PC – So who was it that influencing you to do that?

3 – A-levels teachers and my parents.

PC – You where at school – you went straight from 6th form

3 – Straight from 6th form there yeah and then I joined Coventry the following October. I lost a year but I gained the work experience that I think allowed me to get into a job here to be honest.

PC – OK. So what was the work experience?

3 – I went to ... first of all I went back to ... when I came back I knew I can't just come home and do nothing. So where I'd had a part-time job in a shop I made that a full-time job, whilst I looked for something a bit more sort of permanent. A friend noticed that there was an opening at a company called XX (*company name*) who make – they're an automotive seat manufacturer, you probably see them in sporty cars.

PC – Are they in Coventry?

3 – No they're in Honiley, they're based in Honiley

PC – I know where Honiley is

3 – XX they do gear boxes and engineering. So somebody tipped me off, a friend of mine's sister works for this company and she said that there was an opening there and it was literally working in their warehouse. I thought 'Well...' cars was/ is my passion and I thought 'Well it's a step in the right direction'. I was working in a motor factors shop and I thought 'It's a step in the right direction away from retail work where there wasn't really a ladder to climb. I was assistant manager and there was a manager who had been there all his life and wasn't going to go anywhere. Well I thought 'It's a job in a warehouse, it's a step in the right direction who knows where it could lead to'. I think I'd been doing that job for about a fortnight when I decided 'I'm going back to University' – 'cause I'd worked in a shop, I'd worked in a warehouse, I decided I'm going back to University either September or October of that year. At which point, within that same week I made that decision in my own head my boss from XX got me into his office and told me that he wanted to put me onto their management training programme and

send me to University. XX and YY being the nearest ones who offered a part-time and to fit in with what my working hours were going to be XX offered the best and I started, actually with XX (*part-time course leader*)

PC – Oh, you started part-time?

3 – I started part-time my first year was part-time.

PC – And then you switched to full-time - you did like a mixed level 1/ level 2...

3 – Yeah. My last year at University was three modules – purchasing, logistics and 331BSS which was my dissertation. So I did a part-time year, two full-time years then part-time.

PC – And did you carry on working while you were ..

3 – I carried on working at XX (*company name*) and then I became the quality engineer for it. I went to work in Germany for them to train on the manufacture and the shipping of the seat that was causing some trouble at Aston Martin. They were integrating a new seat into their new product line and there was a few issues with that and I became the on-site quality engineer, so I was based on the site at Aston Martin. So they only had a small headquarters in Honiley that only deals with ... they import seats and retail them whereas the automotive OEM manufactured seats come straight from Germany - Jaguar, Ford whoever. They needed somebody ... instead every time there was an issue phoning Germany and somebody flying over, they needed somebody there, in England, to get all these teething problems out of the way. So it was a sort of customer development role etc so it was great. But then after about ... my first year at University I'd trained for that in summer, started University in the October, I got to about May, I'd had my Xmas coursework and I think it got to April/ May time courseworks and my exam revision and I was ... by this time I'd got a Blackberry and a laptop and I was getting phone calls all during my lectures ... and the job was 'if there's a problem then you've got to be there to sort it out'. Not a problem with me, but when I said to my boss 'Look, you know, I've got these University results. I've been told I've got to stay above a 60% for a 2:1 and above, you know I'm going to need to either be able to pass a couple of these calls on somebody else or, you know ... I need one of the other'. Basically unfortunately it came to the point where I was either going to be able to put a half hearted effort into my job and a degree or one of the other and my boss supported me at XX in saying 'I'm going to go to University to do this'. 'Cause at that time ... it came to a head when my boss, the attitude from one of my bosses was her answer when I said 'that I needed time for my exams and coursework and I couldn't meet all my work commitments was 'University's just a perk, work comes first'. By this stage I'd really started to enjoy it and see that this was something I wanted to do, I just hadn't got the decisions quite right the first time and by this stage I valued where a degree was going to get me because I'd done the jobs that I would probably have carried on doing if I hadn't got a degree. So the managing director I spoke to him and he supported me in to and I said to him 'I'm going to go away and I'm going to get a first'. I'm not going to give up a good job with good potentials without going away to do something for a reason – I'm going to go away, I going to get a first – I'm going to nail the degree – and that's what I went away and did. I parted company with them and then when I spoke to them again they couldn't offer the structuredness...

PC – The career structure you would get at another company...

3 - ... of a graduate scheme unfortunately. There's only in the UK six employees there so it was very difficult for them to be able to offer me something like ... what with the VW links and that it was...

PC – That's very interesting. So you got the job at XX originally through a friend's sister

3 – Yeah I applied ... they put an advert in the paper and I applied for it

PC – but they told you ... (3 – *Nods his head.*) OK. How did you get the retail job, the original job that you had?

3 – I started that as soon as I got my national insurance number, my brother had worked there. I'd always said I wanted a Saturday job – I'd always done that paper rounds and stuff like that – but as soon as I had my national insurance number I went and got a job there and then I got another job at Warwickshire Golf Club on the driving range picking up the balls.

PC – You probably saw our former Dean there quite often!

3 – What I did then, I got on very well with the people at the Warwickshire, and when I went back to work full-time in the shop I was also doing evenings at the Warwickshire again.

PC – How did you get the Warwickshire job come about?

3 – When I was young I started ... I only worked Sunday mornings in the car shop so I started Friday and Saturday nights on the driving range. When I came back from Uni they offered me a full-time job in the shop. I thought 'that's fine I want some extra money, I'll do some evenings back at the Warwickshire' and they said 'That's fine, come and do some evenings behind

the bar'. So I got that ... I'd got contacts there so when I left XX (*original employer*) and went to XX (*University name*) part-time I went back to the Warwickshire and said ' Could I come back here on a part-time basis?'. So I was never out of work from October 2007 to October 2010 I was at the Warwickshire on a semi-full time basis, especially my final year when I was only doing three modules. So I became – what was it called - team leader a sort of supervisor behind the bar, including weddings and all that kind of thing as well.

(Comments aside)

PC – So when XX (*part-time course tutor*) took you on the part-time course what were your actual entry qualifications? What A-level results did you get?

3 – I got a B, a C and a D, which was a big letdown for me really. I was predicted ... well I didn't drop below a B at GCSE, A*, As and Bs at GCSE and I started my A-levels ... you know people were talking about Oxbridge.

PC – Which school did you go to?

3 – (*Names a state school in Kenilworth*). That was not something that necessarily interested me but it was something that was mentioned - there was high hopes for me to well at A-level, let's just say that. Whilst I was at 6th form, I wouldn't blame it on anybody else, but my parents broke up, never any issues there but ... 30 years and it ended over night ...

PC – Don't say that it's my 30th anniversary this year!

3 – Oh really (laughs). I think it was the night before my oral French A-level exam my Granddad passed away. So this was right in the middle of exam time ... and, I don't know, maybe it was my rebellious period. Throughout my GCSEs I'd been quite hard working and diligent and got my driving licence so I could go and drink and spend time with women and things like that, and my focus on my studies and my attendance petered out quite a lot. So unfortunately I really, really kick myself now - my A-levels weren't all they could have been and certainly now I'd struggle with University places with results like that, I know I would.

PC – How many UCAS points would that translate to?

3 – 260?

PC – Even for us you'd be on the borderline I think.

3 – I think I would. No, it was not 260 it's 240. It restricted me from applying for certain graduate jobs. Being able to put a first up there didn't mean anything if you didn't have the points to put down there and if somebody had told you that when you were younger - they probably did but you don't listen.

PC – So you did french...

3 – Business Studies - which is the main reason for me having an interest in Business - English and French.

PC - I think you said that both your parents went to University, what degrees did they do?

3 – My Mum studied at Warwick University and I believe it was ... I think it was English and Drama; she's now an A-level English teacher at a secondary school. My father I believe – he lives in Canada now so it's difficult to contact him and double check – I think he may well have ... he studied at York St Johns I know that ...

PC – Oh right, that's where that connection comes from...

3 – ... and lived in the same street as I did when I lived there. I think – he started as a PE teacher I think it was more of sporty ...

PC – Yeah, I think York St Johns used to be a like a teacher training type college.

3 - ... and then I know he had to do something through the Open University, in the early stages of their marriage, in order to get themselves ... I think that might be his PGCE, something like that, 'cause I remember him saying to me when I was studying at University in the evenings 'do it whilst you're young' and that's when I was saying about doing it part-time and he said 'if you've got the opportunity leave the job and do it while you promise yourself you're going to do a good job of it and make it worthwhile do it 'cause then when you're older it's hell of a lot more difficult.

PC – Any more immediate family that have been to University – brothers, sisters, Aunties, Uncles, cousins?

3 – My brother went to University, he got into a second year of an engineering degree, got to HNC level, drop out of that , became self-employed and is now working for the National Grid on a training programme and having to do it all over again to be an engineer – electrical engineer instead of an automotive engineer.

PC – What exactly is your current job?

3 – The title is 'graduate trainee – purchase' so I'm the purchasing graduate from 2010, which mean that after 18 months/ 2 years I will slot into a buyers role if I've satisfied what BB(*company name*) would like and BB are satisfied if what I'd like which this day and age you know ... (laughs) if they offered me a job I would accept it. So it will be a buyers role eventually.

PC – So you're working in that department at the moment and learning the trade.

3 – On the graduate scheme you spend - there's compulsory placements – I've spent a month in sales and marketing. We have a team of tour guides who meet customers on a daily basis, give them a tour, and they want us to, not only gain the product knowledge that you get through going on the tours and seeing the factory again and again, but to meet the customers and see where they pitch our products against others, and things like that. I spent a month doing that. In the month of July I've got a month of line training which is where I'll be working in engine assembly, wood shop and things like that, just to get hands on with the products and know them inside out, which is useful especially in purchasing because I will be touching and feeling and fitting the products that I've actually – some of them of which I've sourced since October. My sponsoring department is and always will be purchasing so I spent 6 months from October to March in there. I did a month in sales, I did another two months in purchasing, July I'll be in line training and then from there it's between me and my sponsoring manager who's the purchasing –based executive who said 'We want a graduate' . He has to structure my learning and he's said he wants me to do placements in finance etc etc. I've said I want to do placements in quality and engineering to understand the impact we have on them and the impact they have on us just so that ... What they try to get us to do is spend time on the other side of the table so that you know what your decisions ... what the implications are on other people, so that before you start you've got an understanding of everybody's role and what's going on.

(Comments relating directly to the company and the work undertaken at the factory)

PC – Let's go back to before you went to York St Johns. Why did you decide to go to University?

3 – (long pause)

PC – Was it a conscious decisions, or was it just something

3 – ... it wasn't a conscious decision. It was ... what was it called ... it evolved with my education: you do your GCSEs; you do your A-levels; and then you go to University.

PC – So all through school it was just what you ... you never thought of not going?

3 – I quite fancied the idea of being an electrician, I was quite ... I went to a couple of presentations at colleges and things like that but I didn't receive nearly as much, you know, positive support with that as I did with ... (PC – What from your parents?) ... yeah ... as I did when I mentioned University, and I thank them for that now. But that did interest me. It wasn't my only option, to be honest, but given that I wasn't particularly pro-active about looking into that nothing happened and it was only because other people like careers service in 6th form, my parents, were quite pro-active about getting me into University and my Mum knew the route for A-level students through UCAS which she drilled that into me and knew what I was doing and where I should be at what dates, that I ended up going 'cause as I said, at that time my interests lay elsewhere and I really wasn't pro-active in thinking about my future at the time.

PC – So why did you choose Business Management?

3 – The thing that I did enjoy at my A-levels and I did work hard at, and I got the B in, was Business Studies, and I regretted ever since I started choosing ... I always said that if I got an A* in French at GCSE I'd do it at A-level, if not I won't and I did, so I did. But the parallel class to French at A-level was Economics, taught by the same person as the business studies teacher, who I got on really well with, and I looked at what they were doing in Economics and would really have liked to have done that. I would maybe have chosen a Business Economics degree, I'm not sure. That's the only thing that really stimulated me, the English and the French was just more of the same from school. The business is what got me going and I could relate to it ... more than... rather just looking ... some things you feel like you're learning for the sake of learning, business I could see myself actually relating it to real life situations.

PC – So when you started your degree what was the career you had in mind – did you have a career in mind at the end of the degree?

3 – (Pause) To be honest when I first started it was more what I liked – I liked the Marketing side, I liked the Marketing modules, I always thought it sounded like – I don't know might sound silly - but it sounded like quite a cool place to work. That wasn't with any sort of back ... you know there wasn't really any information behind it, that was just an observation. To be honest it wasn't really until, I think it was in my second year when I started 236 the supply chain management module, that I started to have more of an interest in purchasing/ logistics you know sort of supply chain/ operations side of the business started to interest me and I moved away from HR and marketing and focused on the supply chain base modules really.

PC – Was that XX (*module leader's name*) module?

3 – Yes. In the first year it was 120BSS which was Business Process Management which I think was changed drastically or got on...

PC – Did that have SAP in it?

3- Yes. It was a nightmare!

PC – Was that when YY (*former module leader now retired*) was running it

3 – I think WW (*member of staff also now retired*) tried her best with the SAP ... *comments about the manner in which the module was operated*

PC – So it was that second year compulsory module in operations....

3 – I think so, yeah ... Marketing/ HR side ... to really wanted to concentrate ... and in my final year it was ... well unfortunately because of the way I'd structured it I specifically wanted to do logistics and purchasing, but I wanted to leave my dissertation to the final year because obviously the more experience and learning you've done the better it is. So I couldn't do ... the way the modules lay I didn't end up managing to do 336 which was Strategic Supply Chain Management the one that follows on from 236. Unfortunately that means that I'm not fully CIPS accredited. I need to do 366BSS or there's a module that CIPS can offer me which is called strategic supply chain management. They've said that with that module and 3 years in a purchasing role I'll have full CIPS accreditation. I did think about contacting XX (*part-time degree tutor*) on a part-time basis to see if you could distance learn that 366 – a conversation for another day really ... that's something that I contacted XX University ... might be useful for...

PC – When you began your job search, it must have been sort of September, at the outset what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle to actually getting a graduate level job?

3 – (Long pause)... it's difficult. What it turns out to have been was relevant work experience, at the time ... (pause) ... I don't know ... at the time I just thought the sheer quantity of people going into that, you know, in the graduate labour market it was just going to be a case of can I sell ... you know, am I going to be good enough to get myself through these interviews because they're quite a gruelling process.

PC – So where you just applying for graduate schemes?

3 – Yeah. I went to the graduate recruitment fair which XX (*University*) arranged transport for. I'd been ... well I'd been ... I was that adamant that once I'd done this that I was doing it to get myself a graduate job that I actually went the year before I finished university, just to sort of scope it out really, just to see what was expected. I still turned up in a suit with a load of CVs but I don't really know why because I wasn't going to be in that market but somebody might remember your face, you never know. So for the second year running in September I went to the NEC, the graduate recruitment fair, and put myself out there really. I was open for any ideas but it was supply chain management or purchasing roles that I was interested in, purchasing was the one that really interested me. I like sales, I like negotiation, talking to people, dealing with people but I didn't know if I wanted to go into the pressure of sales so early because I think when you're young people can really ... I don't know I in hindsight I'd quite like it, I think the targets would motivate me. Previously I thought 'No, it would de-motivate you. You get a pat on the back when you meet your targets and you get a kick up the backside when you don't', that's not for me. Whereas now I'm in the working mode I might like that.

PC – So how many schemes did you actually apply for?

3 – Good lord ... 10/15 yeah

PC – And how many interviews ... how many assessment centres, interviews?

3 – Enterprise, Rolls Royce, RM, XX (*interviewee 3's company*) ... I think four.

PC - So you actually got through the initial stage in four of them?

3 - Well, no I got through the initial stage on a few but I slipped up on ... John Lewis I read my application back and there was a couple of spelling mistakes in it which I think ... you don't even deserve to be looked at if you can't be bothered to make sure that it reads correctly. So that was my first learning point. Sainsbury's, the SHL online test - never done those before - clicked the button and just thought 'what on earth are these!' That failed. Tesco's I never heard back from. So there was a few that I didn't get past, actually sitting at an assessment centre where you're doing group exercises there was four.

PC - And was XX the only one you got beyond...

3 - I was offered two. One was Enterprise rent a car, one was XX and then Rolls Royce and RM, who are an IT software company based in Oxford/ Newbury way ... I got to the final stages but...

PC - These applications they were all just through the NEC...

3 - RM was at the NEC, Rolls Royce was on-line, XX I met at the NEC, and Enterprise was on-line I think.

(Comments aside concerning Enterprise)

PC - Why did you choose XX

3 - It was quite a significant ... there was quite a difference in salary, and I just felt there was a bit more prestige may be, you know, on your CV and ... Well one was a 37 hour contract and other one the person has told you you're going to be there 50/60 hours per week! Can't deny that that does come into it. I just thought there's a lot of opportunity there but then with XX group there's quite a lot of opportunity here, so you know, you're not restricting yourself too much and automotive is what I'm interested in, although they're both automotive ones more ... getting involved with cars the other ones treating cars as a just a service you've ordered. Just on a personal ... I mean in hindsight Enterprise is a lot closer to home and I've got girlfriend, family, friends who are a lot closer to home so there's swings and roundabouts but I think I'm quite happy with the choice

PC - It's not far - straight down the M6

3 - Exactly - we finish at midday on a Friday so I can be home by quarter to two/ two O'clock.

AREA 3 - THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC - OK. Just thinking back to your time at University I've got a list of a number of things I just want you to tell me how big an impact you think these actually had on you getting the job that you've got. The first one is the actual **degree subject** itself - the fact you did business management?

3 - I'm tempted to say ... well ... one thing makes me tempted to say it's not relevant at all and that is that the graduate in purchasing last year has got a law degree and one of the sales and marketing graduates for this year has got a philosophy degree. However the fact that I did a purchasing module in my final year and my dissertation was solely based on purchasing within the automotive industry I feel gave me a lot to talk about at interview stage. So I think if you're a suitable candidate for a business then it can sometimes be overlooked and a degree in any subject. However I think it certainly assists you if you've got knowledge ... but the thing is with the graduate training programme is that they're always looking for the right person that fits the business and then they will train you to do your job. However in order to come across as knowledgeable in your interview obviously it certainly helps to have a good idea of practises in that area. So that's a real difficult one.

PC - How important was the fact that it was a first? You said one the hurdles turned out to be the fact that you didn't have UCAS points

3 - Well that for me was always ... a) I was giving up the job and I said, you know 'I've done this because I can't put 100% into one thing or the other and if I go to University that's what I set myself to do'. I thought, yeah, employability wise that will help but it was more of a personal goal really and the fact that I needed to bring other things up a level.

PC - But was it a factor for the job?

3 - I don't think it was. To apply you needed a 2:1 or above, I put predicted first, but I mean there was nothing in concrete. Yeah I got to write the word 'first' rather than 'predicted 2:1' but I think anybody could do that if they were feeling optimistic, you know, until it's actually set in concrete I don't think it would sway them too far one way or another. I think in future it might do now it's for definite but given...

PC - If you hadn't got a first or 2:1 would you have not got the job?

3 – I'd have had to have a 2:1 or above, so I do think it's important.

PC – What about the **add+vantage modules** on the programme? Which ones did you do?

3 – I did French.

PC – Was that of any impact on getting the job

3 – It wasn't, because German would have been but French wasn't however. Did it help me with employability? No. Was it an added bonus? I guess yes, but as far as contributing towards my degree and being able to get a job, probably not.

PC – What about the **Employability and Learning Package / ELP**?

3 – That was tied in with Pebblepad?

PC – It was tied in with the add+vantage modules.

3 – Yeah (pause). Because of the way it was done, I think, and there was deadlines put on and you won't get everything else unless you do this, it was seen more as a ... people ... Instead of seeing it as this is actually here to help me it was another .. 'Well if I don't do this it's like a piece of coursework – leave it to the last minute, do it the night before, doesn't matter what you put as long as you think you're satisfied'. You'd do it and you'd hand it in. I found that the appointments I made of my own back with XX (*names a member of the careers service*) in employability

PC – XX?

3 – Young lady who worked over in the student's centre. (*3 is referring to the University Careers Service*) She sat down with me and we went through... we did a lot of work on my CV and we did a lot of work on my interview questions, techniques and things like that. That was unbelievably good.

PC – That was a major impact

3 – Major. I think because my CV was a schoolboy CV. The first year I took it to the recruitment fairs somebody saw it and said 'don't give that to anybody'. In that year I turned round tweaked it, did September got it just the job so the ... but that was off my own back, that was ... it was put on notices telling you about it. I think that if you want to do something then you identify the need for it, the service was fantastic. But unless students actually have made the conscious decision to do that I think it will probably always be seen as something that's a nag, something that has got to be done.

PC – What about the **career development modules**, 'cause that is meant to be the function of those – the professional development module, career development at level 2 any impact?

3 – I'm trying to think of these career development

PC – I don't know the module codes. They were the 10 credit modules that balanced the add+vantage module

3 – (Long pause). I think they did, but I don't know I think the ... the attendance and things like that wasn't great. I don't know. I don't want to sound unprofessional; I think people might see these as a nag, doing things like that. Something they have to turn up to rather than something that is of benefit. However ... because in there you learn about the different types of CVs, for example, but at no point did we get our own CV out and do a workshop on our own CV. I think they could be very good, from what I remember, and it's probably too long ago really it might have changed, but practice of what actually happens at an assessment day would be brilliant, rather than saying ... you know I think actually sitting down and ... I mean everybody knows after they've been through this the sort of questions they ask but I'd never ... you never given an example of a time when you have sort of questions ... I was never asked one of those until I went to see XX (*the careers advisor*) and she told me typical assessment day questions. If we'd have done a couple of workshops on that, that would have been fantastic.

PC – So XX is based in the Students Union?

3 – XX is based in the Student Centre

PC – In the student centre (*comments aside on location which confirms 3 is talking about the careers service*). Anything else that was a main impact on you getting the ...

3 – Talking to YY (*course tutor named*) and hearing her talk about what other graduates have managed to do, you know, where they'd managed to get jobs and how they'd done it.

PC – Would it have been useful if those graduates had come in and spoken to you about how they'd done it?

3 – Well this is what I was about to get onto. We did have some ex-Business Management/ Business Studies students come in and talk to us and one of those was a gentleman called WW (*graduate named*) who was an ex-student who went on to work for Shop Direct in Liverpool and he's been one of the success stories on the XX University website. He came in and did a talk about how he'd gone from ... how he'd took a graduate scheme and how he got from this to that and where he was now and what he was doing. And he mentioned about purchasing and his links with purchasing and I hung around at the end of the presentations, 'cause two or three ex-students, I think he did a very good presentation a couple of others did and I seem to remember one who'd ...

PC – was this is YY (*module leader named*) module?

3 – Yes. I think one of them just stood and wanted to blow their trumpet about how much money they earned and how important they were. But WW gave a really good presentation and I stuck around and spoken to him afterwards and ended up... I managed to organise a week's work up at Littlewoods during reading week of my second to last year, which was something else to put on my CV as a bit of purchasing experience. So the opportunities from things like that are, from an employability point of view, really good. To be able to speak to other people, find out how they did it, 'cause even if you don't think it at the time – not everybody 'cause some people will see it as an excuse to sit on their phone 'cause they've not got a lesson and they're not going to be tested on it – but the people that care, you know, you sort of think 'Oh, you know, that's where you want to get to. These are the people that have done it, how did they do it?' and you start to engage with it. It's a real life experience about ... some real life experience of interviews and things like that would be great.

PC - Anything else missing? You've identified that – you've talked about the need for more practice interviews, for assessment centres, interview questions. Anything else missing from the programme that would have helped you get this job do you think?

3 – Not necessarily, the programme but around the programme. Not really. And you've got to want to get ... as soon as you want to do it you'll do it. You'll find the services and make the most of them. If you don't want it they can push... people can offer you as much as you like but as a student you can be quite dismissive because there's always something more important going through your head, might be a night out or, you know, things like that and that's what it's like unfortunately.

PC – Did you use the university careers service at all?

3 – I think that's the student centre – that was the careers service based in the student centre. I think it was ... was it XX (Faculty careers advisor named) (PC – Yes, yes) I think I organised through her.

PC – Your experience at university on your course was that actually a good preparation for what you do now? Not necessarily the academic side of it, which you've talked about, but the softer side – all the skills stuff like making you work in groups, presentations ...

3 – Yeah, I think so, yeah, certainly presentations yeah. I was in the team for ... we went for the NIBS, the Business network ...

PC – Oh you were in that team were you?

3 – Yeah. Unfortunately we didn't get through

PC – Was that the one in Amsterdam (3 – No, it was ...) or Kolding, Denmark?

3 – Yes that's the one. There was myself and three or four others. Things like that were invaluable, you know, the amount you learnt from that. But in your seminars, having to prepare coursework and learn to motivate other people in a group that weren't necessarily motivated. Yeah, I think ... and independence as well, you're given a lot of independence and responsibilities put on your shoulders, you know, you get out what you put in, and it's the same with the job really so ... I think so.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – You're in the graduate scheme now – what's your career plan? Have you got a career plan at all?

3 – (Long pause) I have. I'd like to continue in what I'm doing now to get to the end of my training programme and to get into a buyers role. I'd like to do some time as a buyer. I'm interested in retail purchasing as well (*comments aside*). I'd like to get some experience of retail purchasing – don't ask me why there's a big attraction of London, for some reason.

PC – (Laughs) Have you seen the house prices!

3 – Well exactly, but the salaries to match! Sales does attract me a lot. There's nothing set in stone really. I didn't know I wanted to do this until ... I still don't know if I want to do this it's one of those things were I enjoy what I do, and it's relevant to what I've learnt in the past but ... really that's one thing I like about the fact that it's a big company, there's a lot of opportunity to turn corners wherever really.

PC – You're not set on this for evermore?

3 – No I don't think so, no.

PC – You're going to do the CIPS qualification

3 – Yes, yes

PC – Any other qualifications that you're planning ...

3 – I've toyed with the idea of an MA. I talked to XX (course tutor) if I didn't succeed with the 1st that I'd like to go on and do an MA. And she admitted herself that ... She said if I get a first about going away and getting some work and then thinking about it, she said if you get 2:1...

PC – What would you do an MA in?

3 – I've never really looked into it to be honest. I'd like to do a bigger study of what I've already done which was into the Western versus the Japanese purchasing techniques because I was told research would reveal that, you know, Japanese techniques where, you know, supplier development are in place. But certainly from a this perspective and from a YY(company name)perspective we follow what group do and what group say and it's still a lot of 'get your suppliers in, beat them hard with the slot (??) until you get the best price out of him, keep lots of secrets from them and they'll keep lots of secrets from you' and lowest price wins, and lots of suppliers. Whereas the Japanese approach is not like that at all, you partner your suppliers, sometimes you own shares in each other ... and it's not like that at all it is quite the opposite. We do work with suppliers to do reverse engineering and they will open up on process and techniques, but we will keep our books closed and they will keep their books closed, and it's not best practice but ...

PC – I mean do YY ... will they support you through an MBA programme, for instance, 'cause that's an obvious thing to in two or three years?

3 – The existing younger people in the Department, some graduates - some are not, who are doing CIPS have all been offered since April an MA

PC – An MA rather than an MBA

3 – I think it's an MA

PC- Do you have a link with a particular University?

3 – It would probably be Stoke...

PC – Staffordshire...

3 – Staffordshire, I don't know. I don't honestly know – or Manchester Met, I'm not sure

(Comments aside)

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – Just thinking back on your success and getting where you are now – what advice would you give to students? If you were one of these alumni who came and spoke to our final year students what advice do you think you would give them?

3 – Apply early. Gain as much work experience as you possibly can, even if it's just a week somewhere that you can build on and say what you learnt from it and what you've identified, and what you like about it, and how you think that could fit into the role that you're applying for. You know there's a lot that can be gained from even a week's work experience. Know what you want to do ... well you don't know what you want to do, but have an idea of where you want to go and what you want to do. Take some time to think about it and then, you know, actually actively seek it because jobs don't come and look for you and if you leave it past Christmas pretty much all the application dates have gone. And that's the one valuable thing a friend of mine, who got onto a graduate application scheme, told me 'don't wait till you've finished your final year at Uni to apply, you need to apply at the start of the final year'.

PC – Something one or two others I’ve interviewed have said is you have to make space to do this.

3 – Well this is it. I won’t make any bones about it I was hugely advantaged in that I only did three modules in my final year. You had to put an awful lot of time into these applications, which do take a lot of time, and if you’re trying to write a dissertation, some of these applications are as long as a dissertation, it is incredibly difficult without compromising your University work. At the end of the day you’re doing that University work to enable you to fill out those applications and get the jobs so it is important to assign time to doing that, if that’s what you want to do.

PC – What do you think you’ve learnt about yourself through doing this? (Long pause from 3). Self reflective – it’s difficult to do!

3 – Self reflection. I think you’ve just taught me a lesson and said ‘Well where do you see ... is this what you want to do in the future?’ Even though I’m in a role now that I enjoy doing, and I’m looking forward to progressing through, I still don’t know what I want to do. People always asked me at school ‘What do you want to do?’; at 6th Form ‘What do you want to do?’ and I’m still ...

PC – But what have you learnt. Take yourself four years ago when you left York St Johns ... what’s one important thing you’ve learnt about yourself?

3 – About myself ... (long pause). I don’t know, probably that nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it. At the start if you’d have told me when I first went to University and then left that four or five years down the line that I’d be looking at finishing University with a 1st I’d have said ‘No chance, it’s not going to happen’. By putting myself in the situation of having a couple of jobs that I wouldn’t want to have for the rest of my life, you can adapt to suit, you know, if you want to achieve something you can achieve it. If you set yourself a target, and you sacrifice enough for that target, which I did by giving a job up, anything’s achievable. And I said ‘I will get a graduate job’, and I’d have taken any graduate job, you know, I was prepared to apply for anything and take anything, so I guess nothing’s impossible really.

PC - Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	3
Your degree class	2
3 - ... I think it might have helped at a glance on a paper, it said ‘predicted’ so I don’t know how much water that would have held really.	
Your add+vantage modules	1
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
3 – I can’t really remember a great deal about it to be honest	
The career development modules on your course	1
The University’s careers service	4
Your family	3
3 – Big impact, yeah	
PC – Go on then why a big impact?	
3 – Because it was them in the first place that, like I said, was the influence to go to University, do well etc and I ... well no, I did that and then backed out of it and did for myself and that was a big impact so I suppose that’s not my family that’s me isn’t it, so I guess it’s a 3, some impact it wasn’t that big an impact.	
Personal contacts	4
3 - ... can that be any personal contacts as in relationships with people I made at university?	
PC – Any personal contacts. You’ve spoken about getting the original job at Ricardo’s	

<p>3 – I had a good relationship with for example WW (<i>three members of University staff named</i>) and mean would they be personal contacts (PC – yeah, yeah) ... oh 100%, big impact. Building a relationship with them and bugging XX (<i>course tutor</i>) to death by knocking on her door all the time allowed me much more access to the people that mattered than if I hadn't done so, definitely.</p>	
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PC – Anything else?

3 – No, I think the biggest thing really is that the University's career's service offers a fantastic service but it's only any use to an undergraduate when they decide that they want to use it. That sounds bad 'cause it sounds disparaging against the add+vantage and ELP and I wouldn't want to do that, but until somebody wants to really take advantage of. It's definitely there and it's advertised and people know that it's there and it should be taken advantage of, but until you decide yourself that that's what you want to do I don't think students will get the most out of it.

PC – Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : ANNA

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Your degree was Business Management

A – Yes

PC – It was a First

A – Yes, 76%

PC – Did you go to straight to University after you finished school or college

A - Yes, straight from A-Levels

PC – No full-time work experience before

A- No

PC – What were your entry qualifications?

A - 3 A-levels and an AS

PC – 3 A-levels and one AS and how many UCAS points, can you remember?

A – It would have been 300 from the full A-levels plus 40 from the AS plus a couple of 10 credits here and there

PC – Neither of your parents or guardians went to University and you’ve no brothers or sisters been to University

A – No, my younger sister is now at University, but no I was the first one to go

PC – So it’s yes, but younger sister. Anybody else in your close family ever been to University?

A – No

PC - Current job is that you are a graduate teaching assistant

(Aside comments)

PC- This is your first job since graduating?

A – Yes

(Aside comments)

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Just a few questions about before you went to University why you chose the route that you went. So why did you decide to go to University.

A - I did my GCSEs and A-levels at College ‘cause I was taught at home ... because I was taught at home I had this big idea in my head that I wanted to go to University, that was the point I wanted to get to and that was the point that motivated me towards finishing GCSEs and A-levels so I actually have something to work towards – there wasn’t a career aspiration in mind at that point

PC – So you didn’t actually go to secondary school (A - no) - you were taught at home (A - yes) – until what age?

A – Until I was 15 ... and then I went to college to do my GCSEs in a year – the year that would have been year 11 at school – I went for that year to do GCSEs

PC – But it’s while you were at home? (A – yes) Do you think it would have been different if you’d have gone to a secondary school

A – Probably because of the secondary schools that were in the local area weren’t exactly great schools. It changed my motivation and changed the way I worked – it was a lot more self motivated

PC – But the intention always was to go to University

A – Yes

PC – So why did you choose Business Management?

A – Because I'd had experience in my ... basically from when I could work I worked in retail and I very quickly got promoted to store management level, before I'd even finished by AS's so it was at that point that I thought, well if I can do that at this age what can I do with a degree in 10 years time

PC – so you were working part-time and you got to store management

A – Yes, I was weekend store manager and then in the summer and extended breaks I covered the store manager and doing new stores opening and all sorts – lots of opportunities and lots of sorts of different things that I could do.

PC – So is that store management experience which made you think that Business Management was ... (A - Yes). You didn't think of doing degrees in retail management?

A – No, I did think of doing linguistics – my A-levels where Business, English Language and Sociology. Hated English when I was taught at home but when I went to the college I had a really good English teacher, I had no intention at taking it at A-level but they said you're really good at it you should take it at A-level and they said you're still good at it you should consider doing a degree in it, or a degree in one of the areas. So my academic side was thinking 'do linguistics' – but it was the practical application that made me think 'Business' instead.

PC – The English degree here is good actually...

A – Well I actually went to XX University in North Wales to start with to do linguistics because they've got David Chrystal there as one of their Professors...

(Comments aside)

.... I originally went there, that's why I was a Feb starter, because I didn't actually like the University.

(Comments aside)

PC – Right, so you actually started English

A – I started Linguistics – it was a business degree in the end up there

PC – And then you transferred back

A – Yeah

PC – From what you've said that this part-time job in retail where you ended up as a weekend store manager etc that was the main reason why you wanted to do this particular degree, that coupled with this self-starting, self-motivation through being taught at home

A – It was the idea that if I could achieved what I had achieved at sort of 16/17 what could I achieve with a degree and bit more experience that pushed the Business side of it more

PC – So that really answers the next question of what really attracted you to this career or job ... it's because of what you've just said isn't it

A – Yes it's the business side of it, being able to see things improve and improve areas of businesses – yeah it's got a lot to do with what I did in retail and then health care after that

PC – Did anybody else have any sort of influence on you in terms of this career because that's not where you have ended up is it you've ended up as an academic – but let's just stick with the Business, any other influence on that?

A – In terms of doing the business especially rather than the linguistics degree there was a bit of influence from my Mum sort of saying 'well you are more likely to get a job with a business degree than you are with a linguistics degree' which was a motivator. So from the employability side the job that I was doing at the time, had an influence. I had different options that I could have done with that. So there was some family influence and some, not necessarily from the company I was working for but because of what I was doing influenced me slightly more.

PC – Nothing from the careers service at the college?

A – No, No - because I had originally wanted to do all sciences for my A-levels and they put me off doing that so, it was completely a personal choice as what I chose to do, there was some obviously influence ... I had some very good lecturers at college in Business and in the English side which were good and helped

(Comments aside)

PC – So, it's clear that you started with a very clear idea about what you wanted to do and why you wanted to do it, the next obvious question is why have you not done that – why have you ended up a graduate teaching assistant?

A – Because as I said at the beginning the point I wanted to get to was to go to University and then what I got here a said 'well I've done that now what's the next bit that I'd do'? So the ability to stay within the University environment and do something different and not as a student, I never thought I'd be able to do this kind of job, didn't imagine it possible, so when the opportunity was there, it was brilliant.

PC – Why did you think you'd not be able to do it?

A – I always thought it was something you had to have lots of experience to do, and it was a very select few that got into that as a profession, it wasn't necessarily quite open, that it was quite a closed profession; it was very much that you had to be top of the field to do it. So I'd never saw it as an option, it was the ideal that it would be absolutely amazing to do, but never saw it as an actual option, especially coming straight out of University as an option to anything like that.

PC – Just thinking back 18 months what do you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you were going to have to overcome to get a graduate level job?

A – Time to actually do the applications – I was still working 30 hours per week and doing my undergraduate degree and applying for graduate level jobs, it was a complete balancing act, with no social life for at least 6 months

PC – Did that prove to be the case? Did you actually manage to get many job applications in?

A – I did, not as many as some of the people that weren't working and doing things but I was quite selective with what I went for I wasn't going to waste my time with ones that I thought might be interesting but I'd probably hate it ... very focused about which ones I was applying for.

PC – And what were you applying for?

A – General management, NHS going back into healthcare that was the job I was doing at the time – things around supply chain as well – but it was very focused on what I knew I was good at and gave me the best development.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – Just thinking about your time at University. I have a list of thing here, just a few comments on whether you think these were helpful in getting the job you've actually got

Your degree subject

A – Yes, I don't think I'd be able to my job without it

Your add+vantage modules

A – The ones that I had first and second year no, my third year one yes because my third year one was project management.

PC – What was year 1 and 2?

A – Year 1 was entrepreneurship, but that was mandatory because of the Feb start course there was no option but to do it, and the second year one was leadership which was very HR focus.

PC – Nothing from the leadership...

A- It was very just skimming the surface with leadership, there was more in terms of leadership within the HR modules within the degree than there was within the specific add+vantage module but the year 3 management one was useful

PC – Why?

A – I had an interest in it before, it was good to see some practical application of it using it now in Masters - using to obviously in undergraduate dissertations, and now my Masters dissertation, for the planning and some of the organisation stuff and also then the possibility of being able to use that, as the starting point, and do some in my Masters and the possibility of looking at teaching some of the areas, but the project management one was brilliant.

PC – So how do you think that helped you get the job that you've got?

A – The organisation

PC – ... and it's not something that you would have got from the rest of the course?

A – To some extent yes because of how I was juggling it as I was working at the same time doing quite a few hours, and doing the degree, I was already doing some of that time management, the organisation, self motivation from being taught at home but that really did lay it out in one 10 credit module – this is what you need to do – step, step, step

The employability learning package (ELP)

A – No, no

PC – Go on why?

A - As a student point of view it was something that you did to just get it done. It wasn't particularly beneficial, I don't know if that was because of the way it was delivered or perhaps the fact it was literally just pass/fail to it. There wasn't particularly any value to it associated with that bit, it was quite generic where s the add+vantage modules were obviously specific, you'd chosen to do that area, ELP felt a bit forced upon you.

PC - Now on Business Management you had **career development/ skills modules** in each of your 3 stages – where those of any use to you?

A – Yes, obviously the first year one was focused more on University skills rather than careers skills Second and third year ones which focused on career were very good, it was preparation with CVs and things like that to a high enough standard, job search techniques, which of course for me came in useful because I didn't want to apply for everything, it was quite selective in what I was applying for. Looking back on it, it could have maybe included stuff like mock assessment centres – the first assessment centre I went to I didn't have a clue what it was all about. So that would have been useful but the career development modules did help with all the other bits it just sort of missed the assessment centre, a section to cover interview technique as well... (*Comments aside*) ... interviews I'm fine with, but assessment centres because, of course, it's time constrained you've only got a certain amount of time to get your personality and approach across, it was very odd – very sort of dog eat dog atmosphere!

PC – Now these career development modules, was it something you realised at the time were beneficial, or was it something you realised afterwards?

A – Not in the second year, I didn't realise why I was doing it in my second year, but in my third year yes ... and now because I've taught on the second year one, I've now had to pass on to the students that I'm teaching that 'you need to start thinking about it your second year rather than your third year' because that would have helped me massively to have that head start of six months when I was in my third year applying for stuff. To actually have that idea that it needs to start that little bit sooner than second year.

The University's careers service

A – No, because of how good the careers modules were on the degrees, I didn't feel the need to use it at all. Because of the way the assessment was set up it was the opportunity to speak to employability tutors for the degrees anyway, didn't see the need to go to the careers service, or the EPU – the structure of the assessment for the careers modules and the help that was there, and the fact that there was time designated each week for one-to-one sessions there was not need to.

PC – so the University's right in taking all the resources and giving it to the Faculties which is what they have done

A- I don't see the need to, because obviously if you've got a central one it's not specific to your degrees it's not the experience – whereas when it was combined into the degree it was so much better because it wasn't necessarily just one-to-one sessions you had small group where you were working together and you could see somebody's CV was sight better because of what they'd included was far better than one-to-one generic sessions.

Anything else connected with your time at University?

A – An odd one but probably my dissertation because of the time and the organisation that took – that was helpful, not necessarily in getting a job but it was a good talking point at interviews – good skills that came with it

PC – What does your current job entail?

A – Lots of things! Teaching, academic personal tutor, marking, planning, organisation – lots of things, field trips, I went to Belgium on the field trip there and was involved with the planning.

PC – and do you think that what you experienced as an UG student was good preparation for what you are doing now?

A – Yes, to be able to pass things on to students without them realising quite how short the age gap in between me and them. Being able to pass stuff on to them like with the second year career development module – getting that idea into their heads quite quickly that they need to not necessarily applying for things in the second year but looking at what they want to apply for the following year, and passing that advice on to them has been very useful.

PC – Is there anything else you think that you would like to have seen when you were a student that would have been helpful?

A – When I did my degree we didn't have personal tutors which would have been good, but you used your dissertation supervisors for that, but to have that from the start would have been useful to have that sort of continuity going through but other than that not really because it was a lot of stuff done within the Faculty, within the degrees that was helpful, lots of different input from different people on that one – it necessarily wasn't an issue for me because I had some experience within industry but some sort of application sometimes with some of the topic areas made it easier because I knew how things worked on the supply chain sort of things because I'd worked in retail and knew how the retail supply chain worked it was quite easy of me to apply the theory backwards – but for those people who didn't work and hadn't worked I can see that being a benefit to have some sort of exposure.

PC – The application of knowledge

A – Yeah. To be able to see that it's relevant to somewhere and that it's not just a page in a book that it actually does happen.

PC – What about the softer type of employability type skills – team working, communication, presentation, leadership – was that present in what you did?

A – Yes it was. Part of the assessment in year 3 was student-led seminars which covered a lot of different skills, so presentation skills, communication, the team work, things like that – there was a lot of group and team work within the degree, possibly a little too much sometimes but it was always something that was there and you knew how to do that from later on

PC – Has that been useful in your job?

A- Yes because it's not an isolated job its working in a big group, a big team Yeah there is relevance of that, if I couldn't do a presentation I'd be a bit stuck in front of a classroom – in stunned silence!

PC - but did you realise at the time the importance of those or is it just something you've realised since?

A – Certainly with the presentations stuff I realised that that was because I came in from being taught at home I was quite nervous, quite shy, and wouldn't have stood up in front of 5 people when I came to University and I could see that building year on year, how much more confident I was getting on with presentations, so I could certainly see that one – that was because it was something I was so petrified of when I first started. The communication things, groups and team work I think that for me was developed at University and also at work because I had both at the same time it was something that was done across.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC - Just thinking ahead a bit more how do you see your career developing in the future?

A – Hopefully in an academic setting still. Obviously I've seen the industry side, I've had the experience there will I was doing my degree which was a good thing, I didn't have to wait to have that experience until after I'd done my degree – but definitely in the academic side now.

PC – How are you actually going to pursue that?

A – Teaching qualification, Masters and a lot of determination and hopefully going through and continuing with some success in this job I've got at the moment.

PC – Any you undertaking any further studies

A – Yes, PG Cert in Higher Education and MSc in Engineering and Supply Chain Management

PC – Thinking back on your success in getting the graduate job what advice would you give to students when they actually start on this career search?

A – Start early as possible and find what you want to apply for before they open so the year before you want to be applying – I wish I'd gone through now and had a database done in my second year knowing companies opening date that it was for that year, closing dates, so that I could have managed that application process better, because there was a couple that I missed out on applying for because I didn't realise how soon some of the closing dates were, some that closed early because of popularity - but definitely to start early and prioritise the job search. But also gaining some experience before they get to the third year so they've got something to use, to show skills to use in interviews, not just going with the university background but having some work experience as well.

PC – So you would advice them to do the work experience add+vantage modules

A- Yes. The ones where, there's a couple ... (PC – student placements, they can do it through the year ...). Yeah, some of the ones I've taught this year want to go into teaching afterwards and they've picked add+vantage modules teaching in schools,

so its finding something relevant to use so it's just not going with a university qualification but there's something to back it up with in terms of experience

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC - What do you think is the most important thing you've learnt about yourself during this process of getting to this point in terms of job search?

A – That I could actually do something because of being taught at home it was very isolated, nobody necessarily to compare against. So being able to go to University was obviously good – got the grades, got into university, that was a good thing - but actually that I could achieve, quite highly, and have that motivation to keep going all the way through.

Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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our degree subject	4			
Your degree class	4			
Your add+vantage modules	3			
The employability learning package (ELP)	1			
The career development modules on your course	4			
The University's careers service	1			
Your family	3			
Personal contacts	4			
A – contacts I had within the University				

PC – Anything else?

A – No don't think so ... possibly peers actually,

PC – OK, in what way?

A - Because of the social group that I had in my third year especially, it was quite an odd – none of us had social lives which is very odd for University, we also were pushing each other and poking bears with sticks – 'I got a better grade than you' sort of thing. It was an odd way it worked, but it was very much you wanted to achieve more so that you could have achieve the best in group, in some ways. But it was certainly an impact in – a sounding board as well, "have you applied for graduate jobs – what are you applying for?" so they would have had an impact on getting a job and the process of... as well as achieving the actual degree result . I think that if I hadn't have had the peer group that I had I don't think I'd have ... I'd have still pushed myself with the self motivation from being taught at home but it was the competition element that came with it that was good for me.

PC – And these were all Business Management students?

A – Yeah all Business Management

PC – and did they all achieve high grades?

A – Most, some no, but most of them did. Most had work experience and were doing other things as well – without that we'd have lost the competition element

PC – Thank you.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : BETH

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

B – Human Resource Management

PC – What class of degree did you get?

B – 2.1

PC – Did you go straight to University after college?

B – Yes

PC – and was it a college or a school you went to?

B – A college

PC – Are you local?

B – No I live in Leicester

PC – You live in Leicester

B – Went to XX Grammar and then YY College

PC - OK

PC – What were your entry qualifications for University?

B – I had 320 UCAS points and I went on a scholarship

PC – Did you do A-levels?

B – A BTEC National diploma in Business

PC – Did either of your parents/ guardians go to University

B – No

PC – Any brother or sisters?

B – My sisters there now – she's older than me so she's doing it later

PC – But you were the first. And nobody else in your immediate family, cousins, aunties, uncles

B – No

PC – What is your current job?

B – I'm HR/ payroll administrator

PC – Is it your first job since graduation?

B – I worked at Next for a month in the call centre and then I found this, as soon as I got my degree qualification I went for the interview for this, and that was it.

PC – OK. So it's the first graduate job, the other was just ... (B – to fill the gap) ... yes to fill the gap.

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – The next section is around before you went to University. Why did you decide to go to University?

B – Well there were two reasons really. Once I'd finished my BTEC I looked originally for jobs and didn't find anything that I would like to do with what I had qualification wise so I decided that I needed to further my education to a degree to enable me to get a position I was more interested in otherwise it was more lower level work that was available which I wasn't overly keen on.

PC – So why did you choose HRM as your degree?

B – I did the BTEC National that's 19 different sections – we did Marketing, Finance, Economics and the HR was something that I really enjoyed right from the start and did best in the modules so I decided that that was the way to go forward

PC – So right from the outset it was HRM that was the career that you wanted?

B – That was the only course that I applied to Uni for

PC – And how many other Uni's did you apply to?

B – Six

(Interruption)

PC – So the main reason for going to University was that you had this particular career in mind and that determined your choice of degree (B - yeah really) you didn't consider any other options?

B – Before I went to college I looked at apprenticeships originally but they weren't really forthcoming on places that wanted to give you them really and that was in administration and didn't think I would be massively happy with it but it would be OK, kind of thing – but that didn't go through and then I looked for jobs didn't find jobs so then it was kind well what do I want to do and where do I want to go and it was sort of left with well you can't get anything you want to do now so let's further it.

PC – From what you are saying the University option was because you couldn't find a job, couldn't find an apprenticeship – the whole school career wasn't focused to going to University

B – No. It was only in my second year when I considered that I was doing quite well and I applied initially, obviously you apply through UCAS you do it the year before, and it wasn't until I couldn't find a job that I wanted, I was pretty adamant that I wanted to go straight into a job like my parents and stuff and start from the bottom and work my way up in a company but that wasn't really available so.

PC – What was it that attracted you to HR as a career?

B – I've always been really like people orientated helping people like meeting people and helping people – you hear of all these horror stories of how people have been made redundant, getting sacked and stuff – it's kind of well that's not fair and if I was doing it I won't do it that way, you know – let's try and understand why it is done in that way and what I could do when in that position.

PC – Who influenced you in this choice of career – careers service at school, teachers, family, friends

B – I did business studies at GCSE and really got along with my business studies teacher – really quite an influential person – but he hated the HR module which was quite odd, and I went to college and really just took to it, so it was kind of, well I decided that that is what I was doing and nobody else really had a choice.

PC – So it very much came through doing the business course – the GCSE, the BTEC national....

B – That was pretty much how I decided, I always wanted to go into business, not on my own, but that was where my interest was from a young age.

PC – When you started looking for jobs, presumably in the final year of your degree – what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you were going to have to overcome?

B – Other graduates. People who had better grades than me and had experience because I did a placement one day a year whilst I was in my last year to try and combat that kind of thing but it's always other graduates on my courses people who've

all got firsts and I'm kind of like I'm going to be competing with you, why are they going to pick me over you?'. I've learnt differently now I've been here why they do pick people over them however that was an issue that I thought.

PC – So at the time it was other graduates who you thought perhaps were better positioned just simply because....

B – I thought because of the grades and like a lot of people had admin experience and had already got that kind of ... or knew somebody and could get a placement and I thought well I haven't got anything like that, I've always worked in shops and kind of stuff but not really officey. If I'm up against somebody who's done a placement in their gap years and stuff - I thought well why would that work. More graduates, I wasn't worried about employment at the time just because I think if you want a job then you'll go and get a job. I would have done anything to work, as I did work at Next, until I found what I was looking for.

PC – You've sort of already hinted at this, but did this actually prove to be a hurdle? (B - finding a job?) – this peer competition, this work experience... did it turn out to be that much of an issue?

B – I only applied for one job and that was this job. It was the first I applied, the first one I thought I can do that and consequently since working here I've looked at the other applicants, about 12 from my class, and they did better than me .

PC – really, but you got the job

B – Yes, I was well pleased!!! (laughs)

PC – Why do you think you got the job?

B – XX who recruited me said I wanted to learn, I wanted to be moulded, I wasn't going to say 'I can do this, I can do that', whereas a lot of my other peers were kind of 'well I want to be at your level next year' they had far too many expectations, she said, on how they were going to progress, and pay they wanted and what they expected in general. She preferred how I wanted to learn and it wasn't all about the money but getting on the ladder and getting a career going rather than 'I want my money and I want it now'

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – Just thinking about your time at University I'm just going to go through a list these things and I want you to think about how useful each of these things was in actually helping you get the job that you've got now.

Your **degree subject**

B – Definitely because it I didn't have a degree in it I wouldn't have the job it was the one thing they were adamant they wanted – you didn't have to have experience but you had to have a degree in HR or HR and Business

Your **add+vantage modules?**

B – No, not at all (laughs)

PC – Which ones did you do?

B – I did the more kind of HR ones, I did leadership two years of that and I did bullying in the workplace basically – I didn't find them at all interesting at the time because I feel that they were done by qualified people in that area they weren't my HR teachers they were from other areas and it didn't really make sense to me and I don't think I've ever used anything and I don't think anybody has ever asked me about them at all.

PC – You mentioned before that you worked one day a week, that wasn't an add+vantage module?

B – No I did that just off my own back

Employability Learning Package?

B- No (laughs) – that wasn't really anything either (laughs). No I didn't really take that one for anything, that didn't help at all – because that about how you'd write your CV and stuff I'd done modules obviously before that on it and know now it's very much preferencing, if somebody likes the look of your CV then they have a read and instantly and everybody's different so it was a bityou tell me you like it like this but I've seen plenty of CVs like that put 'no' straight away to much information kind of thing.

Career development modules on your course?

B – I found them helpful more for a support way in terms of you got to see your tutor more often and you got to say anything what was wrong with the course at the time and not really for what they enclose so much. It was that you had that point of contact you had somebody you could talk whereas I thought that the whole time at Uni you were very segregated, you couldn't speak to anybody you know 'I'm going to see you three times and that's it'. I found it helpful just for that kind of contact, but the actual modules itself.

PC – In those contacts that you had with tutors were they asking you about what you were going to do, were they giving you some sort of help and support?

B – I found the second year one interesting because we did the whole recruitment process, from the start to the finish and we wrote all the letters I found that really interesting to do, but I wouldn't say it's helped in this job particularly or in getting this job, if somebody likes you they'll like you because the people who applied for this job from Uni I know them, they're nice people who got really good grades but that hasn't helped them that they got their CV that way and they know this process because otherwise they'd have the job.

PC – Did you have any help writing your CV?

B – No.

University careers service

B – Never used it

PC – Any reason why?

B – I just didn't - they sent the emails about the jobs they had available, that's how I got this job as I'd seen it on there, other than that I never went to it just because, one I didn't feel that it was very accessible to go and speak to people and it just didn't hit my radar – 'right lets go here and do this' because you can find jobs yourself really I think – if what to find something, you know, you can.

PC – What does your current job actually entail?

B – I look after the company payroll for 800 people and that involves all the information that goes around paying people bonuses, redundancy costs everything like that – I do all the admin for starters and leavers so I sort of take people right through the process – and help with recruitment, booking interviews, and speaking to candidates in the telephone interviews – employer relations anyone who has a query rings up and I'll answer, anything like that. I also do reception, admin for company cars – so it's quite a big mix of roles.

PC – Do you feel that your University experiences was actually good preparation for this?

B – I think it's given me a lot of knowledge, you know background information, and you do sort start to think – it's helped me with my questioning skills and you do start to analyse and asking 'why' and not just taking 'because that's just the way we do it' as an answer. So I'd say it's definitely opened my mind that way.

PC – Do you think there's anything else the University could have provided you by way of help to get the role, maybe something on your course that was missing?

B – Not really, no. The course itself was what it was kind of thing, it covered everything you needed to know it gave you really good knowledge of all the subjects. In getting the role itself it's just whether people just like you on meeting you really, and getting through the first few hurdles, getting your CV looked at and interviews and stuff.

(Comments aside)

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – Just thinking about where you are now and where you might go in the future. What are you planning to do in the future?

B – The idea is that I stay here and progress because XX who did my recruitment she went from a new University 8 years ago and now does all the recruitment for all the sites and employer relations. With where you are you do a mix of everything so you're really exposed so for me its staying where I am and when I feel more comfortable I'll do my CIPD in HR and the company will sponsor me through that.

PC – You're going to do the CIPD, you've not started yet?

B – No, I wanted to take a year out to get to know people here, to get to understand the job here, so I know everything I need to do on a daily basis before I take something else on. I know it's not something I'm looking to yet either probably in another year's time, I was really pleased to be out of University at the end of the day – to say if I'm honest with you I couldn't wait to get out, that's why I don't want to do a Masters I just what to do a CIPD not the other part of it.

PC – Is it you wanting to do the CIPD or is it the company saying you have to do the CIPD?

B – I don't have to do it, it's more like 'we'd like you to do it' kind of thing. It's not a pressurised – if I don't want to do it for another year or so but in a year time it's probably something they'd like me to top-up with because everybody else in the Dept has it.

PC – Just thinking back on your success, because it is a success to get a graduate level job, what advice do you think you'd give to students who are about to embark on this?

B – Definitely go and get a placement, that's what I'd definitely say because I went and found my voluntary one because YY's (*module leader*) friend came in, did a talk and I just emailed her 'can I do your admin for a day for free', I volunteered for about 3 or 4 months and that's what set me apart from other people so that helped a lot

PC – How did you actually get the placement?

B – YY had somebody come in to speak to us, the whole class, and she left her email address if they wanted to ask any questions and she said that she'd had to make her two admin people redundant so I sort of went 'Oh OK! Can I come and do you admin. But I definitely feel that that massively helped. It also prepared me for what was to come for being in an office situation if not full on because it was only one full day a week so get a nice transition and not like arghh!!

(Comments aside)

PC – So was that through one of the career development modules?

B – I think it was though YY career development module that she came and spoke to us – it was just kind of I seen the opportunity and I went for it – it wasn't kind of 'I want people to come and do a placement for me' it's just 'cause I asked and she took a liking to me and she wanted me to do it.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – What's most important thing you've learnt about yourself through this process of getting this job?

B – Not just to accept no as an answer on what people say is definite, because it's not in general. People will say no or they say I don't think that's right or this and that's what I've learnt right the way along because people will say no they don't like me CV – I'd be like I'd show it at Uni and they'd say no that's awful but I didn't want to change it because I thought it was really legible, I felt it was exactly how I'd like it and it paid wonders. So I think it's not always listening to what everyone else wants you to do, having a bit of your own common sense to it.

Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	4
Your add+vantage modules	1
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
The career development modules on your course	2
The University's careers service	1
Your family	1
B – They'd have been happy if I'd wanted to pick up litter all day.(laughs) (PC – Really!) It's never been we want you to do this it's been going and do what you want. They brought me up to know that you need a job you need to go and do these things. So it was never about what they wanted it was go and do what you want, just get there	
PC – so there was no push from the family to go to University	

B- No not at all	
Personal contacts	1
B- No, I really follow that if I want to do something I do it	

PC – Anything else that's had an impact?

B – Just my placement I'd say that that massively helped and think it would help anybody who could get a part-time job in admin or anything like that, anything that gives them something extra

PC – Thank you very much.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : CLAIRE

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

C – I did Marketing Management

PC – What was your class of degree?

C - First

PC – Did you go straight to University after school/ college?

C – No I did one year of 6th form, AS levels, then went onto my local college and did a BTEC National Diploma and then came here, so I did three years – so yeah I did come straight from college, but I did three years.

PC – Why the switch?

C – I got ill when I was doing AS levels I missed a couple of months of school so I started again. I wasn't doing very well, I was finding AS levels really, really hard – the jump from GCSE to AS is massive and then I got ill and missed about half of the year, so in the end I just thought I'd start from scratch. At the time I knew I was interested in business, creative arts – so I did textiles and product design at that time – and fashion, I wasn't quite sure what route to take. So at that point I was doing business and textiles and then I decided that I really, really liked business but I wasn't very good at the Maths side of it. So then I went on to do Media BTEC and found doing practical's a lot more easier for me, and I'm dyslexic, so I found that doing more coursework worked for me rather than going into the exams ... also at the time a lot of my friends were leaving 6th form they all found it really, really hard as well and they all went on to do jobs or went to college. So even though I found it really hard and I got really ill everyone else was doing that at the same time, everyone kind of moved at the same time.

PC – So why did you decide to college rather onto a job like some of your friends were doing?

C – I don't think my Mum would have let me (laughs). We had lots of conversations about it, and it was "... if I want to earn lots of money and have a good job – you need to further your education". I knew that as well and I felt that wasn't the route for me - I did have a look at apprenticeships, I wasn't looking at getting 'a job' it was either you go into work placements or you carry on your education and at the time it was you go and do plumbing, you know, that kind of thing, there wasn't really anything I wanted to do, that I could do. I did very briefly consider becoming a plumber that was all of about a week (laughs)

PC – You'd earn lots of money!

C - I know that's why I did consider it and I had a lot of boy mates who did that kind of thing as well – it did kind of interest me a bit, but it wasn't for me. So that's when I went down the whole practical element of being at college doing a BTEC and that's very work based as well, I did a lot of work experience alongside it.

PC – but it was a media BTEC rather than Business?

C – Media, I did Business GCSE, Business AS and then actually took down the route of doing media and that's where I learnt about advertising and marketing and that's where I drew back onto my business background – brought the two together.

PC – How many UCAS points did you get?

C – I got DDM, so 320.

PC – Did either of your parents/ guardians go to University

C – No, my Dad was in foster care he had no education went straight out to work. My Mum had one O-level and went straight out to work but now my Mum is actually in college doing an access, part-time, so she's looking to go to Uni in 2012 (laughs) – get there in the end!

PC – Any brother or sisters?

C – Yeah there's four of us, I'm the eldest – my sister is going this year

PC – Anybody else in your family, cousins, uncles, aunties?

C – My aunty actually went to Uni the same year as me but she's 10 years older than me she's 34 but she graduated the same year as me.

PC – What is your current job?

C – I'm a recruitment and admissions co-ordinator.

PC – Is that the first job since graduation?

C – No, I started in the recruitment and admissions office as a graduate recruitment assistant. So I finished Uni in the summer and I was employed by September at the University doing external recruitment, mainly 6th level recruitment and then in the March I went for the co-ordinator role and started there in March, so same office but two jobs.

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – I think you sort of started to answer this but why did you decide to go to University?

C – To get a good job basically and have lots of money. I thought it was the only route I could do to get lots of money. At the time when I was at school I didn't really think about education, I think my Mum did, but I wasn't really aware of what I needed to do or how to do it, I thought 15 just plod along I didn't think about it at all. It wasn't until I got a bit older and I realised that – end of year 11 beginning of 6th form - that I realised that I actually need to go to University cause none of my family have gone and they don't really have lots of money – I want to have lots of money, I'm very, very money orientated – and I found that that was the route to get lots of money.

PC - You chose Marketing, again you've sort of answered this, but why Marketing?

C - 'Cause I really enjoyed business and being creative and those two elements together- I choose Marketing, and because I'm not very good at Maths - I did have to do accountancy on my first year - but that's why I picked it, I really enjoy Business but I cannot do all of the Business aspects.

PC – So it brought together the two sides – the creative media side and the business

C - ... the side I really enjoy, yeah.

PC – So the main reason for going to University and your choice of subject we've already discussed. Who were the main influences on this (C- why go to University?) Why go to University and why this particular subject?

C – Again, my Mum (laugh) – but a lot of my friends. I had friends that were leaving at 6th form either to go into apprenticeships or they went on to go to University, they were the kind of the only routes you went and it was kind of looked up that if you didn't go and you didn't have an apprenticeship well that's kind of not good enough – so I kind of had to. What was the other question, sorry?

PC – Just who the main influences were?

C – Friends, my Mum and I suppose teachers to a certain extent, even though with a BTEC not everyone goes to University but the majority of us did apply to go even though at the end they didn't all go, they did encourage everyone to apply.

PC – Did you use the careers service at college at all – which college was it?

C – I'm from Oxfordshire originally so XX. I used Connexions a couple of times throughout being a teenager and I didn't think they were very helpful, but I think I also kind of knew what I kind of wanted to do and I think I had the common sense, and so did my family and friends, to work it out for myself. When I did go and visit them I didn't find that they advised me any further.

PC – So the intention was always to go into this Marketing type of area

C – Yes, at first it was fashion, but then it was a businessy related one. I did look at media courses, but I didn't think I was creative enough to do a degree in media so that's why I came back and brought the business.

PC – When you came to your final year of your degree and you began to think about getting a job what did you think at that time was going to be the biggest hurdle?

C – Getting work experience. To a job if you've not got any type of work experience then you are not even going to be considered to go for a graduate job. I've got friends who have graduated and not bothered to get work experience at college, in their degree and they don't actually have a proper job – they have a job but not a graduate job. So I thought that was really hard...

PC - sorry, what type of work experience do you have?

C – I started doing business and marketing related work experience way back when I was 16/ 17 I worked in a marketing dept and actually had a job in the local newspaper and had my own classified section and I got adverts in for it, I had work experience at a radio station, I did a three month placement in the marketing dept at a training company at home – I cannot remember what else I've got (laugh)

PC – Was it you sorting this out?

C – Yes I did it all myself. I advertised myself and people came to me and said 'do you want to work for me' – I did it solely myself all the way through

PC – and the idea was that you were always going to do a Marketing degree, you wanted a career

C – A career in creative business

PC – so it was a definite plan of action

C – Yes from when I was about 16 or 17 I knew the area, so I went and got the work experience from when I was a young age

PC – So when you started applying for jobs you already had this work experience so did you think that there was anything else that you felt was going to work against you in the jobs market?

C – (pause) The University you come from. When I started looking at jobs there was a lot that often asked for red-brick universities and I was like 'oh, I've never even heard of the fact that you had to have gone to certain universities to even be considered applying for the job. The other thing I found was being dyslexic I can't do the psychometric tests that are part of the graduate tests and that really, really held me back on actually applying for proper graduate schemes 'cause there's actually no point in me applying because I couldn't actually get past the first stage. I did try once, but just can't do them 'cause the test that you do for the graduate schemes are the similar test you do for whether you're dyslexic or not and that's what why – so it was a massive, massive thing for me personally.

PC – and did it prove to be big problem

C – not in the end because I got a job quicker than any of my friends, and I got a graduate job but I just thought that all the big companies there was no way I would have ever been considered for them, even though I got pretty good work experience, I got a first, I did everything possible anyone else would have thought about doing, but because I couldn't do the actual tests they wouldn't even look at me.

PC – So the job you got you didn't have to do all of that?

C – No, I had to do a presentation and obviously with my degree I did a lot of presentations (laughs) that's one of my strong points, so obviously and interview. Then the job I've gone for this time I had to do an admissions test, but it was not the same, it's a different type of test.

PC – and how many jobs did you actually apply for before you got one?

C – Three - no, one, two was it there? – no, I turned down an interview because I'd already got a job here. I went for a job as an 'Aim Higher' co-ordinator at a university in Essex, but I cannot remember which one it is (PC – Essex?) – no there's another one (PC – Anglia Ruskin?) – yes that it.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – Just thinking back to the degree course that you did and your time at University I'm just going to go through a list these things here and whether you thought these were helpful in getting the job or not particularly helpful at all.

Your degree subject

C – I think it is helpful, I do do Marketing, I don't work in the Marketing department but we do do a lot of marketing. I think that's helped me get to the position I am now because I actually organise all the on-campus

events and open days and things like that and because of my degree I've got the skills and the background to help there.

PC – Was that one of the main influences do you think when you went for the interview that you had a Marketing degree?

C – For them picking me or me going for it? No, I think it was because I was a student ambassador and they knew me, I'd been working for them since the end of first year – so I've been I've been in that department for quite a long time.

PC – and do you think the fact that you had a first was important?

C - Yeah, because first of all my job was to go out and sell the University to schools and students so the fact that I came to University, I got a first, I was the first one in my family - I had a lot to talk about to these students as an ambassador of the university and to show them that they can do it as well. So I think it was, yeah.

Your add+vantage modules?

C – At the time ... there was a lot of stigma about doing this module...

PC – What, the student ambassador one?

C – No ... just generally across the university when I was at university, so ignoring the fact of student ambassador just general students. In my first year I did something called working in teams and it was, to be honest, not worth it. I couldn't say I learnt anything from it. It was a multiple choice questionnaire at the end and when you're at degree level you don't expect to do multiple choice things, it should be full on – this is what you do – and I thought that picking that one building that particular skill. The second year one I did the student ambassador one, that's a really, really good scheme and got me to where I am now, it gave me the skills, it gave me the opportunity to work in lots of different areas, you know, that was brilliant. And in my third year I was exempt because I did the summer placement so I didn't have to do the add+vantage module ...

PC - ... the summer placement is an add+vantage module

C - yeah, yeah, so I had to do a piece of coursework or two on the thing. So that was obviously certainly worth it. But from other peoples - some that worth it, definitely really, really good but there are others that – I don't know if they still run that was in 2006 – but there are some other ones that maybe need to be tightened up a little bit.

PC – so you actually did the student ambassador one, the summer placement ...

C- ... but would have done that anyway, because of that that particular module helped me at all it was just the fact that I got credit for it that was of benefit – it didn't actually, you know, do anything extra I was doing it anyway.

PC – and do you think that both those modules had any impact on you actually getting the job?

C – No because I was going to apply for student ambassador anyway and I was going to apply for a summer job so the fact that I did it, no one looked at the fact that they were classed as add+vantage because I was going to do them anyway.

Employability Learning Package?

C – (Pause and laughs)

PC – common on, an honest answer ... it's gone now anyway

C – To be completely honest it was a waste of time. The concept of it you could see why it could be good, but when we were actually doing it I won't say that it actually helped us with careers, it just sort of hindered us because we were trying to concentrate on other coursework and we were having to try and do this piece of work that didn't count towards any module – you just had to do it otherwise they wouldn't let you pass. So it I think it was given a credit, it was actually worth something, then yes – and maybe more work was put into it then yes it might have been worth it – but the fact that if you don't do it then you're not allowed to pass then you're not going to give you a mark towards it's not actually worth anything towards your degree then I think that was the problem with everyone, it was like well 'why do we need to do it?'. It wasn't really sold to us properly, it wasn't really explained to us the importance of it – if that makes sense? ... it was just 'right, right do it'.

PC – So looking back now, do you still think it was a waste of time?

C – Yeah, because I cannot actually remember what I did with it – what I actually did for it, I can remember doing it just SWOT analysis, is that right?

PC – in the first year yeah

C - I think that kind of thing you could incorporate into another module, you don't have to – you wouldn't have to do a whole separate piece on it, maybe in your first year when you start learning about all these different things, all these different models, you can start doing it that way.

PC - On your actual degree programme there were **skills and career development modules** – were they helpful?

C- At the time I wasn't quite sure why they were helpful, but looking back I can understand it now. I think the whole point is that I can understand that this is all really important but it's the way it's sold to you at the time and it was because we did practice tests on psychometric tests, interview techniques, how to do presentations all that – especially in the third year. Second and third year not really, but in third year it was 'right we've got to apply for graduate jobs, how do we do this? How do we make ourselves stand out?' For me I'd worked since I was 13, but there were lots of people in my class who had never ever worked so they had no idea how to do an interview, what tests there would be or anything, so I think that is quite a key thing, especially for third years.

PC – But you didn't realise at the time...

C- No, yeah

University careers service

C – I didn't use them

PC – Any particular reason?

C- I think I went and saw them once actually. We had a presentation from someone and then they said 'oh, your dyslexic you won't get a job in any of the blue chip companies, you're best to work in the councils because they're more helpful to people with disabilities' and I was like 'Oh, OK'. So I didn't ... (PC – oh dear, oh dear!) ... yeah... if you come and see me, so I did go and see her and I was like well, to be honest. That's why I've never used careers I think because I've had negative opinions of them all the way through because I get feedback like that. So I saw them once and they basically said 'you want to apply for council jobs, like work for local authorities and things like that' and I was well 'right OK' and that was it. I don't think any of my friends used them either, everyone I know went and got their own jobs, own placements, own jobs – there was no input from internal - lecturers obviously helped us but that was separate.

PC – Did you use the EPU?

C – No. I think we did have a presentation from them as well. I think we looked on the website but a lot of the jobs that were advertising were really, really local ones and personally I wanted to go home in to Oxford to save me money. And that was what everyone was thinking, I can go home to my home city's and live for a year or so many months, so that side of it wasn't really useful – at the time although this was a couple of years ago.

PC – although the two add-vantage modules you mentioned were helpful were both from the EPU

C – OK, yeah. I went and choose them myself, I didn't have any like advice

PC - Anything else from your time at the University that was helpful – or not helpful?

C – (pause) to be honest I think that the fact that we have personal tutors, I know that not all course have that, I didn't realise that at the time ... but the fact that we had that, that was really good and I had XX and YY and people like that. The marketing lecturers were really, really supportive and I felt that they really, really looked after you and that for me made my degree and helped me to get to where I am now because they really pushed me right at the end to get that first. But externally, looking at all the other departments, not particularly.

PC – What does your current job actually entail; you've sort of touched on this already...?

C – I do admissions, at the moment I have responsibility of all art and design applications. I do the initial first sift of inviting them to interview, or not. I organise all on campus events and I work with the manager who organises the pre-applicant open

days, support on clearing and confirmation – and entry profiles on the UCAS entry website I build all the entry profiles on there for all the courses, so I get all the information from all the different Faculties and put it on there for them.

PC – Do you feel that your University experiences was actually good preparation for this?

C – I know it's a degree so academic – but my be a little more emphasis on practical skills would have been a bit more helpful, cause I felt that we learnt all theory side, and I know obviously it is a degree, but it was very, very theory-based and going out into the working world I've had to build those skills myself, which I did alongside my degree anyway. But I think that for other graduates I'm always like 'you need to skills'. When speak to people I'm like, 'work experience and skills' and when people talk to me about me working my way up the ladder they're all saying to me 'it's all about your experiences'.

PC – OK, but you've already mentioned that you did presentations, were those skills useful?

C – Yep that skill was really useful. We did a lot of presentations in second year definitely, and I did that as my first graduate job – that was my main job was doing presentations, but I don't do that so much anymore.

PC – What about some of the other softer skills such as team working...?

C- We did a lot of team working

PC – has it been useful?

C – (pause) I suppose because you learn to work with different characters. In second year we did a lot of team work, mainly all of our coursework was doing it in teams and looking back you can say that you learnt to work with difficult people, different people – but everyone always says when you're studying, especially when you're paying – when you're having to work with people that are not necessarily pulling their weight and your paying for a degree and someone else is bringing down your mark, then that's always the argument. But I suppose you can say I've learnt different skills, coping skills working with different people that I may have brought into my life now.

PC – Do you think that you've used any of that theoretical stuff – analytical, critical stuff?

C – I do do quite a few report writing, but I wouldn't say that I use it that much, no. But I am currently studying for my professional diploma in marketing – CIM – and I think that that has given me a really good base to get onto this course *(interruption)*... so yeah for that it really, really helped. I've just started that and I've got the practical skills and I've got the academic skills to be able do the work.

PC – and was it your decision to the CIM course

C – yes, I want to be a chartered marketer, I want to get there

PC – that's your ambition

C- Yeah, and that's obviously going to take a couple of years to get there but, I've literally just started it two weeks ago.

PC – So you've a definite career aim

C- Yep

PC – Anything else the University could have provided you by way of help to get your graduate job?

C – (pause) I think we needed – I understand the different things that we've discussed about the different things that I did do career modules, but I think there needs to be a bit more explanation on why – I know why it's important, but other people didn't necessarily know why it's important and how finding the jobs. I think when you first look at going to University everyone's always like 'oh well they'll get me a job' and everyone thinks that the University is going to get them a job – either placement or graduate job – and it's not until people get into their second year that reality hits people and it's like 'Oh right, I've got to find my own job' which is fine, but I think they need to know from the start what you need to do get a job. It is out there, I know that when I began University, it's probably different now, you could see the beginnings of the university helping students to get there – but it wasn't enough. I think with the personal tutors they need to help with the jobs more, rather than just the academic side, they need to help with finding jobs, 'have you looked for jobs? Maybe you can do other things like second year 'you've got to go and research two jobs you want to apply for and I'll help you apply for them' – more one-to-one careers thing rather than you're sitting there with 50 people and someone is telling you how to look for a job. People know how to look for jobs, it's that next step of actually applying to them and maybe more one-to-one or smaller groups maybe working through how you apply for jobs and what the next step is, and writing a CV. There is no support on writing a CV – there might be in the careers department but no one's aware of that. Most of my friends we actually paid a company to

write our CV for us and adapted what they'd written (PC – really!) – at the graduate fair in the NEC there's lots of CV people there and loads of people of our course got them to write our CV. It is obviously a pretty good CV and I've just obviously adapted it to make it more (PC - ... yes, it has to be focused) – yeah, much more focused. So now I've got that template for a CV. I think that, and how to fill out an application form, and when you say you've got skills, how do you apply those skills? You can't just say 'I've got good organisational skills' well 'why have you?'. It's all, you know, applying all those skills.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – Just reflecting back, I'm aware that is this probably part of your job anyway, what advice do you think you'd give to students who are setting out on this job search?

C – So when you say students you mean graduates?

PC – I talking about students who are about to graduate, students who are about to start looking...

C – Well if they haven't got some work experience get some now! Make sure that you do have the right qualifications. For example, a lot of these jobs now are asking for your Maths and English GCSE, I don't have Maths GCSE and that also held me back. I remember looking at BMW they said if you don't have Maths GCSE then you can't come on and I was like but 'I've got 320 UCAS points' and a first in my degree but my Maths GCSE – and I know now that you have to have your Maths GCSE to get in to University – but that's one thing, make sure you've got the right qualifications before you can even think of getting a job, the work experience and make sure that you have a really good CV and get people to help you and do tests on how to practise your interview skills and your presentation skills and your CV writing and all that kind of thing. People go to interviews when they're unprepared, even people who have applied for jobs when they are much older are unprepared and you might have the paperwork because you have the degree, but it's the next step that will get you the job.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – What do you think you've learnt about yourself through this process?

C – That I can do anything. I've done my degree and I've got a first class degree and I only came out with 4 GCSEs at C grade and above and it means it doesn't really matter you can do anything you want, you've just got to apply yourself – and that's what I'm doing now, I'm working my way up in the job and working towards becoming a chartered marketer.

PC – So it's given you confidence

C- Yes. If you ask anyone they'll still say I need support 'cause I'm always like 'I don't know if I could do that' but I know I can really it's just that I need a bit of help (laugh).

PC – Where do you think that lack of confidence comes from

C – ... being dyslexic. Defiantly – but the disabilities office are really, really good. Compared to being at college and school and 6th form they're amazing. They defiantly really helped me, in my third year I spent an hour a week having lessons on essay writing and things, I was very – I don't know what the word is - I didn't want it in my first and second year, I thought I could do it all by myself and then I got to my third year and 'I'm that close to getting my first' I thought just get over there – they helped me with my writing, my report writing. I also used the Centre for Academic Writing as well and that is amazing, they really, really helped me. But, yeah, it's all just because I'm dyslexic really.

PC - Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	3
Your degree class	3
Your add+vantage modules	4
C - ... because of my student ambassador	
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
C ... one, yeah (laughs)	
The career development modules on your course	2
The University's careers service	1

Your family	3
Personal contacts	1
C - ... I don't have any, one	

PC – Anything else?

C – No.

PC – That's it, thank you very much.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : DEEPAK

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

D – Business Management

PC – What was your class of degree did you get?

D – It was a First Class

PC – Did you go to University straight after college?

D - Yes

PC – and was it a college or a school you went to?

D – It was 6th form

PC – So went straight through the same school into 6th form

D – That's right

PC – and was it A-levels

D - Yes

PC – and how many UCAS points?

D – They equivalented to I believe it was 200-220 around that, so it was on the lower mark than what was expected

PC – It's interesting how you've ended up with a First

D – Yeah. I think that going on what it was, when I was at school wanted to join the Police that was my ultimate goal. I got to GCSEs and I thought 'well I'm still going to join the Police when I finish my A-levels' - that isn't going to be an option going to University, and it never really was. It was something that I spoke to my year Head at 6th form about and he said 'Look, university is such a good experience, you can learn a lot from it'. So thought I'd put an application in and applied to YY uni for business management, just to see if I would get the place. I did a lot at 6th form which I think added value to my application with UCAS and to the University and I think that kind of balanced it up a bit – so not only was my grades not that great, but what I put into secondary school in terms of being on student council, helping students out you know, that all came through and I assumed that would carry on at University as well – I think that came through.

PC – So when you went to 6th form the intention was not to go University, it was the Police force (D – yes) and was that a long standing ambition you'd had ...

D – It still is. I had a meeting with a senior Police officer and he said to me 'we've got loads of graduates coming now who have got criminology' and he said 'that's no good if you want to become a manager in the Police, the Police is being run like a business, so we need business type graduates'. I'd read about business management as a degree through the prospectus, I thought 'Oh, that's a brilliant opportunity for me'. I could really apply a lot of what I was going to study to the Police and that's what really sold it to myself. So it was then looking at joining the Police but looking at a different aspect – not about joining the Police and becoming a Police officer, but also how I could develop my career after that as well.

PC – Which A-levels did you do?

D – I did Business Studies, Sociology and Psychology and you did that Citizenship, so that was three and half that we did.

PC – So you've no brothers or sisters or parents, you're the first to go to University

D – I'm the first yes.

PC – What is your current job?

D – My official job title is ‘customer services co-ordinator’ for the XXX Building Society. My role is to ensure that the advisors are doing the jobs basically, make sure that the cashiers are working effectively and also run the front of house, so also make sure that customers are greeted politely and properly. It was a role that I was doing through my university experience but now that I’ve taken the role on solely I’ve taken on more responsibility. So it is the same job because I had this job part-time whilst I was at University – but that had very limited responsibilities since I finished I’ve gone full-time and they’ve given me more responsibility, probably a lot more than a normal co-ordinator would do and that’s because of finishing me University and being able to do that.

PC – So how did you get the job initially?

D – I just applied for it. I had a passion for working in a good company – that came across for my interview when I was 18 and got the job

PC – So you started when you started University

D – Yes

PC – and you did it all the way through University

D – All the way through, yes

PC – Obviously it’s your first job since graduation?

D – That’s right

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – What was it that finally decided you to go University, you’ve spoke about the Police force – why did you go to University rather than straight into the Police force?

D – At the time I could have joined the Police, it would have taken me just 6 months to do, that was definitely one option for me. I’m talking to Police officers, Sergeants and senior, senior officers they all came out with the same thing that the career in the Police is developing and no longer is one of those things that you can just have your basic knowledge it’s about getting as much knowledge as you can before get into the organisation and that’s how you’re going to develop your career later on. So actually, yes to join the Police, but get my degree and join later on, to develop myself as I can and hopefully going up the ranks as I can and that’s what the aim was to do that degree

PC – You’ve explained why you did business management but you’ve now done your degree why didn’t you follow your original aim of going the Police force?

D – My applications in, I’m ready to start, but in the current economic crisis I’ve got to wait until 2013 before I can actually begin – I’m currently serving as a special constable at the moment, I volunteered as a Police officer already I’ve been doing that for about 5 years so I’ve got my foot in the door already, so I know what’s going on behind the scenes and how it’s being managed - they’ve said to me 2012/ 2013, as soon as that comes up I’m be moving up to join the Police, hopefully.

PC – As a graduate recruit?

D – Yes, I’ll be looking to join the high potential development scheme that they offer so it is for graduates and it’s a five year programme and you get to do a Masters as part of that programme, gives you as much support and development – and that’s the aim.

PC – So you did business as one of your A-levels at school – apart from this influence from what you were advised by the Police was there any other influences on why you did business management – I mean you mentioned criminology that might have been something you might have considered.

D – Yeah, definitely, definitely. I think that when I was doing my A-levels and I saw the Business aspect, I also did sociology on the other hand as well so, for me I enjoyed business a lot more, I liked to see things done properly, I liked the figures, balance sheets, also working at the building society I’ve used it to add value to my role there as well. I’ve always liked business as a subject anyway and I think I’ve always thought I could apply business to everything more than I could have done with let’s say a social degree. So like what I’m doing at the moment there’s a lot of what I learnt at university goes into that, same with the Police - two different things, two different aspects but business is something which they can work with and that’s why – and that was advice I got from teachers as well – and family as well.

PC - Why the Police?

D – My Mum always tells me this story that when I was about five I used always go around arresting people, the passion's always been there – when I served as a special constable when I joined, attend the 999 jobs, do all the jobs that a police officer will do, that has confirmed in my mind – cause there's also a clear structure. I like to see a clear structure in a company that's something the Building Society hasn't got at the moment and probably something why I'm not going towards that side – in terms of where I can push myself and where I can aim to be.

PC – Have you got any family who are in the Police force?

D – I've got a couple of friends who are in the Police, not any family relations, but I have got a couple of really close friends who are in the Police and I know the kind of job that they have to do and the stress that they go through, but the rewards are there as well. So the challenge is great, but so is the reward that the end of the day.

PC – So there's no other family members who you're following in the footsteps of?

D – Well in terms of the Police no, but in terms of success there is. One of my oldest uncle's works for a company called Lear Corporation they do the seats for Jaguar so he's one of the senior managers, he gets sent over to Russia and all the other countries to where their factories are. Even when I was growing up he was the most successful person out of the family, he was a very driven man, very intellectual, and I think everyone has an inspiration and wants to be like that person – he's doing really well and I think that's where that's come from – looking up to this one individual who's doing really well for himself but he's very down to earth, you know you can approach him and say 'how did you do it – what could you teach me?' and that's helped me a lot.

PC – Just thinking back 12/ 18 months when you were in your final year, and presumably you started applying for the Police jobs, building society ect. – what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle that you would have to overcome?

D – When I was applying for job?

PC – To get a graduate jobs what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle?

D – I think the biggest hurdle is competition. I was kind of worried about myself: competition from other graduates; competition from people who attended what they would say was better Universities; people who were already in companies that were sending their student, their employees, to go and do degrees, you know, people with life experiences, full-time work experience, something which I didn't have so I think that motivated me to push it a bit further. I knew I had to wait another 3 to 4 years before I joined the Police, I knew I had to do something in between. I have applied for graduate jobs with Jaguar, Nationwide, Network Rail, Virgin – all these different companies just to do for a few years to get some work in. The biggest hurdle for all these companies has been the number of competition that are out there and when I get feedback from companies who I've not been successful with they always say that we've had a massive intake of applications that we're not used to and that's because of the economic crisis there are people which have been made redundant who have a lot more experience than myself. That's the competition base.

PC – So that worry about the competition actually turned out to be the hurdle?

D – That turned out to be the hurdle. I mean the support I got from the University, YY (*course tutor's name*) as well – fantastic, brilliant – lot of motivation, lot of skills. My dissertation was based on public sector cuts was current and valid. The support I got from the University was brilliant – friends, family – but for me to get to where I want to be the actual hurdle is the whole crisis and cuts they are making in the public sector at the moment.

PC – ... and this competition

D – ... yeah and the competition. They've already said to me that when the doors open in 2012 you've got to think about how many applications there are going to be flooding in that will have built up over the years – so that's something I got to face up to.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – Just thinking about your time at your University experience I'm just going to go through a list these things and I want you to think about how important you think these have been in actually getting to the position that you've got now.

PC – Your **degree subject**

D – Yes. I have learnt from the building society after graduating that it has. What they've done is they've asked me when they interviewed me for this job – they asked me what I did at university and I gave them a list of subjects I did and how that can then be applied to my role. So an example could be that I've changed a lot of the processes at the branch, changed all the furniture in the front of house, I've made it more interesting for the customer,

'cause I think everything was in the wrong place the materials weren't being used. The resources weren't being managed properly so it's about changing processes, even things like where forms were filled. Changing them and making them more efficient means we can deal with customers a lot better and quicker they no longer wait in a long queue and its customer satisfaction at the end of the day

PC – So you think that the Business Management degree was one of the key factors. What about the fact that it was a first?

D – The fact that it was a first – I then brought in, my, the whole ... not doing something new but then following it through looking at things outside of the box ... that came through from my first year ... I don't know if you're aware at all I won the course tutor prize overall and after getting feedback from XX (*course tutor*) she said 'we looked back at your work from year 1 to year 3 at University and how much you'd developed all the way through'. I'm at year three level now, if I'd been at year 1 I wouldn't have got a first, probably would have come out with probably a 2:1, even a 2:2. So it was the huge development through the University experience.

PC – Knowing that you had a Business Management degree and it was a first, that was a factor for the Building Society?

D – Yes it was. They've already offered me ... they've got an academy for management scheme that they've offered me to join that, so I said 'give me a year to think about it' and then I'll apply for that. So having a first has really opened doors, however as I said the competition is still there. How many people have got first – has it a really high valuable thing as it used to be, that's the question. I'm finding it quite difficult to get the answer to that.

PC – The proportion for your course has gone up slightly, but not a lot – you're still one of the top 7 or 8%

D – Something to be proud of - I didn't know that! (laughs)

PC - Your **add+vantage** modules?

D - Yes.

PC – Which ones did you do?

D – I did all three leadership – year 1 leadership, year 2 leadership, and year 3. Again I was looking at what I was wanting to do in the Police, leadership was something – I was going to go for this high potential development scheme – looking at the list of the options we could pick, leadership was the one that wanted to do, having the link to Chartered Institute of Management as well. Getting a lot of their work that we were getting through it was something I really wanted to get my ???. Some people struggled, I found sometimes it not as productive. But looking back what I learnt – and I've still got the work at home and I still flick through it – that its actually added value to what I'm doing at the Building Society at the moment. So it has now linked – I couldn't see the link before, I don't think many people could, but looking back when you're actually in employment I think you actually have one. I've written it on my applications so many times, spoke to people about it and its added value.

PC – you didn't think of using the work you were doing for one of the work placement modules?

D – I didn't, the full year one?

PC – No – some of the add+vantage modules are part-time work

D – Voluntary stuff like that. I was already volunteering at the time with the Police 'let me do that as part of my add+vantage' – but when I saw the leadership one I thought 'Great I can do the Police and also get extra educational background' so – leadership was a really good subject that I really enjoyed.

PC – Did it have an impact in terms of getting the job?

D – Doing the leadership add+vantage?

PC – Yeah

D – It was brought up in my interview and they asked me a bit more what I did in it, what sort of areas. Looking, like I said at the academy for management scheme that they've launched already, a lot of their work is what I did in my leadership module – so when I saw that was an option back in university, I thought at an interview what are we going to do (interruption). When they then gave me the list of things they were going to cover at work I saw

the link between the leadership module and my job – I said at my interview ‘I’ve already done all this’ and they said ‘well that’s fine then, at least when I do it again I’ve got the work at home’

University careers service

D – Never used it I am going to be honest with you. It was really well advertised, I think a lot of my friends did use it and went and had a chat with them – the feedback I got from them was very good. I personally never used it as I had myself sorted in terms of wanting to join the Police afterwards. It had a lot of value for them, a lot of my colleagues who finished university - one guy went there quite a lot, but I know he’s ended up in Bangladesh working full-time in a company in Bangladesh and that was supported through the careers and he told me that himself. It did help a lot of people, but me personally, no

PC – I don’t think I’ll interview him!

PC - Career development modules on your course?

D - I would say honestly that they were probably the least enjoyable subject .They were great in terms of the interview skills, doing the application – but a lot of work that we did do I haven’t had to use since. So maybe some people have but from my personal experience – I could have done without it and had that time in the library and do my work. I know a lot of people didn’t go to them may that was because they had other things to do or whether they didn’t enjoy it I don’t know the answer.

PC – So you didn’t find them helpful in terms of job searching, writing CVs, making an application...

D - When I was doing my applications for the graduate jobs - I did about six applications – I didn’t refer to them if that’s what you’re asking in terms of ‘did you use them to do applications’ then no I didn’t for the most part. For some reason I saw the application and just filled it in as best I could – whether I looked at them and then did them, maybe that would have added some value to it, I don’t know the answer to that ... possibly, yeah.

PC - Employability Learning Package?

D – I was alright with that, I didn’t mind that at all.

PC – Was it helpful?

D – It was helpful. It introduces us to new software, also being able to compare jobs ... it was a good way to get us thinking about – ‘cause when you get to University you forget that you’ve got to find a job after university, it’s not a long term thing. I think you get so embroiled with doing work that you forget that you’ve got to be doing job search – doing ELP bits allowed that to happen. Possibly doing the professional modules – doing all the CVs and stuff – did as well. The ELP I didn’t have an issue with that myself to be honest

PC – anything else that’s been helpful to get this role?

D – I think the biggest thing has been the support from staff at the university XX (*course tutor*) has been fantastic, she’s given me the motivation – my dissertation as well – a lot of support and guidance. The modules that I did have really helped a lot.

PC – Cannot remember now - did you have a personal tutor on business management?

D – We did but I never met him. We got introduced to him in year 1 but not since then – I don’t even know what he looks like!

PC – So most of your support came from XX, she was your dissertation tutor ...

D – Yes, yes. She wasn’t kind of coming up and asking me I was arranging slots to see her, giving me some help and guidance – XX is one of those people I found that if you want to do well then she’ll help you do well, if you cannot be bothered she isn’t going to be bothered, and that’s the main thing – I like that about her.

PC – Do you think that what you did at University was actually good preparation for the job you’re doing now?

D – In terms of subjects?

PC – The subjects but also the softer side of it, the presentations all those sort of skills stuff

D – A lot of the modules did require group work, presentations as you’ve said, they do. Every Wednesday I have to do a competitor analysis of how our competitors are doing and every Friday I present to our senior products team, so its about

how to put together a presentation, how to present it – so yeah those skills were developed from the university – if I didn't do them at university I probably wouldn't be having this job right now. A lot of what I do at university has come through to having this job.

PC – The group working?

D – I prefer the group working – not only your working in a team but also communication, team working, organisation, all these sorts of skills that people might not think of doing but you're doing it and it's really important at work. We you get to the real world of work and you're getting paid to do something those skills really are important and I didn't realise how important until I got this job.

PC – You've touched on this, you say that you use the analytical skills as well, you do a competitor analysis. Any particular part of the degree, the theoretical ...

D – Going through most of it ... marketing was one of my choice modules all the way through so that's a key part – that's the reason why we refitted the front of the branch, changed it all completely. A lot of the displays were not being used when I arrived – they hadn't been used at all. So getting them used, putting posters up – just little things like that. Doing services marketing, which is one of the modules I did at university, the bank I used as my coursework for that module and what I know for there in terms of the blueprint of the branch – customers walking in what they see, that all came into me changing that branch. Other modules such as business process management... I learnt a lot, again, about how to make things more efficient. So I've changed forms how they're being put, where they're being put and how they are managed afterwards and how they are being sent up – that's all been changed. It's more efficient now and that's where it come from what I done it that module. Even little bits do make a big difference so the queue speed for customers, gets them out of the branch quicker – it's all added value to what I do. Without it I wouldn't have made the biggest impact.

PC – So it's the softer stuff and also some of the analytical – good. Do you think there's anything else the University could have done to help you getting the job and what you're now doing in the job?

D – (pause) I personally don't think so. A lot of my friends who were at university, we kind of knew that we had to get jobs so we were doing it off our own back – if we needed advice, like those professional skills, YY (*module leader*) used to take those modules, and I know a lot of my friends used to stay behind and ask 'this is the application ...' you know. In terms of could the university do more (pause). The only thing I would probably ask for which we had a couple of times with YY (*Strategy module leader*) have people come in, guest speakers, to talk about what they do, how did they get into their career. That I would probably say ... I would enjoy more if I had the chance to do it again. I know that when YY arranged for people to come and spoke to us they were really good, you know, you could see our degree in a workplace through their eyes and how they developed through the company structure and stuff, so that's what I hope for again if I did my time again.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – So two or three years down the line you're hoping to join the Police force – is there anything you're going to do in the meantime maybe as a second string if you cannot do that?

D – The plan is that I'm probably going to stay here until August anyway and then apply for the management roles ... within the Building Society, they know that's what I'm planning to do. I'm being pushed by my manager at the moment to develop myself to that stage – so in dealing with customer complaints, managing systems, if there's discrepancies dealing with them. My manager developed me to go into that role so that's the plan.

PC – Any professional qualifications – I'm not too familiar with building societies qualifications, are there any professional qualifications you can do, I guess there are?

D – There are plenty (PC – banking?) yeah and CeMAT – CeMAT is the biggest one, the chartered Institute for mortgage practice, but that allows you to go higher up in the Building Society, so a lot of sales managers, regional managers, they will have the CeMAT qualification.

PC – Is that something you're considering maybe?

D – They've offered it to me. What this has taught me is that when I left university it was 'join the Police, join the Police'. It was a massive shock when you ring up and they say 'Oh maybe 2011/12, maybe 2013' so you may be waiting quite a bit – and then I've said 'what do I do next?'. The bank have been really, really good that they've actually offered me other opportunities, they've said that I could have developed as a sales manager, regional sales manager and that this is what you need to be doing now to get into that level, and I'm doing it just case the Police say 'Oh another 10 years' – I want to buy a house and get married !! I Can't wait for that so I'm preparing myself now for those roles later on. So my passion is to join the Police but I'm really lucky that I've got a second option and not many people do, so I'm really grateful about that.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – Just thinking back on your success, because it is a success to get a graduate level job, you seem to have lots of opportunities open to you, what do you think you've learnt about yourself

D – (Pause) Not to be so narrow minded in my career options, opening your doors a bit more. I've actually learnt how flexible I am and can adapt to situations – the branch I was at before this was totally different, the dynamics of the branch, the people were totally different – this branch is much different compared to that. I've developed myself – not to change myself but to kind of adapt to that new environment and identify what needs to be done and then explain it in way that would be of benefit to the branch itself – doing all of that. That's one big shock to myself, and also not being able to join the Police was a shock, and then looking at other options seeing what else is out there for me.

PC - Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	4
Your add+vantage modules	3
The employability learning package (ELP)	3
The career development modules on your course	2
The University's careers service	1
Your family	4
D – The reason I say 4, I'm the first one to actually graduate in my family so – including extended family –so a lot of my cousins have thought about university as an option and they never did before, so I've sold them the benefits. 'Cause our family are very working, so all my uncles, my Dad worked at Jag on the production line that's all he's done. And a lot of the family now see that University could be an option for them	
PC – So when you decided you were going to go to university did you get support from your family?	
D – Yeah massively – it was seen as a really prestigious thing to do to go to university, and to do really well was well was a really big thing. My Mum and Dad definitely gave me the support. Even work gave me support as they knew I was going to university as well - may be they know there were times when I wasn't performing, but they know I had a dissertation due.	
PC – and are you from Coventry	
D – Yeah, from Foleshill, a local lad (laughs)	
Personal contacts	1
D - ... I got it myself.	

PC – Anything else?

D – No.

PC – OK, thanks very much.

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : ED

N.B Interview took place in a Hotel where the interviewee had worked a number of years previously, a fact which is referred to at various points in the interview.

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you tell me which degree it was that you studied?

E – Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Business Management

PC – What was your class?

E – I got a first class

PC – Did you go to University straight after college/ school?

E – No. I left school in '99 did two years FE at XX college, catering, then had seven years before I commenced university in 2007.

PC – So what were you doing in the seven years?

E – In the seven years I worked in a number of jobs - public sector, private sector – in prison services, lots of catering work jobs overseas before returning to the UK.

PC – So why did you decide to give all that up and go to University?

E – When I was 20 I worked with Group 4 and had some pretty terrible experiences at the hands of their management in the prison service and returned back out into hospitality which is what I did at college. I took my skills overseas, partly to see family and have the travel experience. I did it twice, came back and found the work place very hard to get in the UK and I went back to New Zealand on another trip when I realised that I needed to be back in the UK working to a qualification that would get me better recognised in the work place. So almost at the end of the second trip I applied for XX (*university named*) and was accepted.

PC – So on what where the entry qualifications?

E – I was deemed a mature student with significant life experience at the age of 24 it was deemed acceptable that I would stand a chance of being admitted. I had no formal A-Levels.

PC – What did you do at XX college?

E – I was an NVQ level 2, City and Guilds 7062 – food and catering

PC – Were you interviewed as well?

E – I was interviewed over the telephone by the admissions tutor, actually phoned me whilst I was in Australia and by the time I came back – I'd agreed to a formal interview over the phone about three days after I got back, I received a letter about a week later saying ... the questioning was quite different to normal given my circumstances and lack of qualifications.

(comments aside)

PC – Neither of your parents went to University

E – No – neither of them had any Higher Education, the furthest my father got further education, an apprenticeship until he was about 20 and that was it.

PC – Any brother or sisters or immediate family?

E – My younger sister who is 25 now, she has a BSc which is a top-up from HND – she did the final year at Anglia Ruskin to convert an HND, she's qualified in Public Services.

PC – So how would you describe your current job?

E – Sporadic to say the least (*interruption*). What I've doing for about three years, I did this while I was at University is quite unique. I set about working for a couple of agencies in hospitality, literally after I came back - no car, no job, nowhere to live –

and started working in hospitality and got my experience back. A couple of people saw my CV and what I'd achieved beforehand said come and work for us and I built a very portfolio quite quickly of good hospitality operators.

PC – So what sort of thing were you doing

E – They were management jobs. I was running the retail section at the Millennium stadium, at Wembley - looking after £45/50,000 of retail trade and I've kind of carried that forward to one of my jobs now as part of my portfolio. I was doing front of house management for wedding services, private events, house events and then on the grand scheme of things dinners for 3 or 4,000 people.

PC – And you were doing this whilst you were doing your studying?

E – I was doing this whilst doing the degree – even in the third year of the degree I took off for a week to Singapore and did an overseas trade shows which is still part of my portfolio now. In the summer I was going over to Paris and doing the Paris air show, London defence show, Paris defence show - going all over the place taking my work with me working remotely putting in the study hours where I needed to do them. Like to do with the dissertation, I went to the Grand National – tried to compromise with my quality a little bit may be.

PC – If you were asked what your actual job title was (E –now?) how would you describe yourself?

E – Because I'm not under the remit of one company, I kind of diversify but if I said anything 'hotel and hospitality professional' – because it's diverse across, I work with companies that do sales working on commission, with a couple of London companies – leading London companies as well – and a couple well know regional suppliers

PC – Have you set yourself up as a limited company?

E – I'm a limited company

PC- So in effect your chief executive, managing director...

E- Yeah, I'm managing director of my own business yeah. I look after all my own accounts. I have two staff – both (home) University students actually worked for me for the summer – took them to the Paris defence show last year, paid them best I could within reason (*comments inaudible*)

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – The next questions is all about around why you went to University, which sort of described as you got to a certain point, where you were doing reasonably well but you needed something else, something a bit more to take you on further – is that a reasonable summary?

E – The story as it goes is that I was literally on a tour of Australia, I'd worked in the industry in New Zealand, absolutely hated the hotel that I worked in. A very friend of mine was the manager and I turned round to him and said I'm not happy I'm just going to go so I went fruit picking for 10 weeks got back to nature. I realised that I'd got a portfolio of skills but I hadn't kind of – got into any kind of classification, I hadn't got them under any kind of remit. I knew I could do a lot and that I'd achieved a lot by the time I was 24 but I kind of wanted to put it together.

PC – So what were you doing in the catering industry?

E – Basically I'm qualified as a chef. Whilst I was in New Zealand to get my work permit I was working as a chef. With the business I've got now it's brilliant because I can turn my hand to any part of the business anything from the management and directorship all the way down to the actual hands-on skills and that comes in very useful sometimes. What I was doing in New Zealand I just didn't like doing it – working at the hotel we're sat in now, the head chef used to turn way round and say 'you can do it, we know that, maybe there's better things you can work at'. It took me about 10 years to find out that.

PC - Why did you choose Business Management?

E – I'd looked at couple of courses. I wrote my UCAS application sat in a hostel at Rainbow beach in Australia and I'd met some events management graduates and with my knowledge of business and the industry I didn't feel that they've left University with something that I would want. If I went and done events management then I wouldn't learn enough about business – but knowing enough about hospitality and events I thought that if I did generic business in terms of business management I'd then be able to apply it to anything that I did and that seems to be quite the case now.

PC – When you decided to go University did you have the intention of setting up your own business?

E – Absolutely

PC – It was always your intention?

E – It took me about 6 months to realise where I was going and because where I'd been working, my agent – who is one of my partners now. I kind of had the intention when I wrote my UCAS application of getting a graduate job when I left and from day one we were pretty much told that it was going to be competitive in three years time it was right at the beginning of the downturn. 'Get a grip now and get out there' and know your employers, know who they're going to be, and then as the months ran by I was thinking 'Christ, well I'm actually making more now than I would be within two or three years of getting a graduate job' if I'm going to struggle make £20-25,000 why don't I just carry on what I'm doing and make it in half a year – which is roughly what I'm doing. I generally work over the winter, I go crazy from April till October then have nice holidays wherever possible – take off to Australia. So my opinion changed. 2008 was a good summer, the economic downturn was really swinging in and I'm making over £1,000 a week on the road in the summer it didn't seem that bad but it was only going to work to my advantage as a self employed contractor at that point I just decided to make it work for me and then I went self-employed, picked up all my portfolios and said 'we'll make a trade arrangement' and that's how we did it. I still went through the graduate recruitment websites, still applied, I got nothing, in fact I got more rejections than interest so...

PC – Just going back to this decision to go back to University, was there anyone else influencing you – family, friends, I mean you mentioned people at work possibly?

E – I spoke to me good friend in New Zealand who was the general manager at the hotel about what I was doing and you know he said 'you could go back and do this' – he was actually born in Zambia of English parents had to live there for his father's work he came to the UK at the age of 18 and studied when the family went back – he was very encouraging, it will bring your skills together like I said, the ability and the ability to analyse and things like that – generally fulfil the degree but I didn't have it as a degree, but I didn't have it – that kind of wider learning. So that's where that kind of where came from, but in general family certainly influenced me I didn't apply because my sister was going, but I did want to do it – with a view originally to getting a job.

PC – All those years ago when you went to do catering at Northampton did it ever occur to you then about going to University

E – I had absolutely no intention of going in a classroom ever again after secondary school. The town I went to school in I ended up working there a couple of years afterwards then I left and went to college and I very much wanted to be out there – I worked in this hotel 30 odd hours a week while I was at college 5 days a week on the bus. I couldn't wait – I hated tutorials, anything that took me away from the kitchen and make me do written work at the college, boring if you like.

PC – So it wasn't even something that you considered at that age?

E – When I was 18 I did a local youth work Diploma in youth and community development, it was kind of a local authority qualification and with that I had to do quite a lot of written work at that point my mind hadn't come to fruition, if you like, I couldn't really sum up the work and make it happen. I qualified but I didn't think it was any good.

PC – You did apply for some graduate jobs? When you were starting to do that what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle to actually getting one of those jobs?

E – Convincing ... for example I used Proctor and Gamble as one Reckitt Benckiser. The reason I chose those companies because I know them, I'd done some hospitality for them and went for Jaguar, I'd done some things for them as well.. I don't know. The biggest hurdle was going to be why a 27 year old graduating would want to come and work for them why they should hire me over a 21 year old who they could programme.

PC – Did you actually get past the first stage?

E – No, none of them. The problem I had was I think I was 27, yes I've got a degree, I got a first class but a 21 year old, maybe, with no experience was better than somebody who could challenge the status quo.

PC – and as this feedback you got from the companies?

E – No, I spoke with a couple of the employability tutors who said that it might be the case but they go on to make excellent project managers later on because that's the kind of – as an external, taking a project with no prior knowledge, really kind of come in to themselves. It was quite up-setting sort of being rejected if you like but the guys at Uni kind of justified it ...

PC – thinking about your company you've got now – what was the biggest hurdle in setting it up?

E – (long pause) .. errm I don't know. I did entrepreneurship at XX (*university name*) as well XX my tutor did a really good job at convincing me that I was this person with these characteristics and I think that I just sort of accepted the fact that errm I was different if you like and that's the way it was going to go. Hurdle wise, maintaining the confidence to do it, sometimes I wake up in the mornings and think 'do I really need this? Why can't I get up an hour earlier and go and sit in an office all day – Friday night I look after another hotel in my portfolio near here and I met a couple who, may be morally wrongly, but they were guests at the hotel. I asked them where they were staying they said they were at a wedding with friends, they said they were looking at wedding caterers for their wedding in Oxfordshire and, maybe I was slightly out of line, but I did suggest having a quiet word with me later on 'cause it's in the remit to do so, and this afternoon we'll quote them from that wedding to the tune of £16,000. This says to me that I'm doing sufficiently well and that's the reason I'm doing what I'm doing.

PC – So it was confidence essentially

E – The hurdle was confidence and it's staying power, do I .. I spoke to a good director friend of mine from London today who I work overseas for, frequently go overseas for, as part of his company and he's like 'stick with it' and I sort of said 'it's quite, very quite' . I you think well you can spend some money in January because of holiday, February it will pick up a bit, March was appalling, April sort of like 10 days – but then May, June, July, August, September, October you can do £30,000 that seems wrong. So its confidence, staying power, to stick with it and does come together.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – Just thinking about your time at University on your degree I'm just going to go through a list these things and I just want you to think about how influential these have been in what you do in setting up this business

Your degree subject

PC – I know you've explained why you chose Business Management has that proved to be a major factor ...

E – Yeah I think so. I mean the first year for example, some of the career development stuff at that point seemed a little bit kind basic you have to say but the content, but I think a few of the things we did on the first year swinging round into the second year added a little more value to it. Generally speaking the law aspect proved incredibly useful, one of the things I did with a recent contract legal tender in London was a legal interpretation – 'well how do you know this? No one should ... this is legal statute and... but this is legal statute and policy', ' .. well 'I can', ' then fine' (*Comments aside*) 17m quid tender and I'm sat there with one of the Directors of the company – he does legal interpretation but he said he'd never come across anyone that wasn't his age that could sit there and absolutely take this to bits and understand it in the same way – we're talking a 63 page contracts - agreements it was a day's work in itself, statistics and stuff like that almost in honesty it's like it's OK if you can just pass this' sort of thing and then you can make up your things in other places – it was a bit weak. But every part of it was I think – Strategy was the ... I found the hardest and it's the most used part of the portfolio now. I hated it with a passion, and now it's the thing I use the most.

PC – You use the most - even more than the accounts?

E – The accounts I pay someone to do (laughs)

PC- That's what I know most people do, but if you can just understand roughly what you're looking at

E – Yeah, if you work out the figures, I do quotes – that wedding today will be £16/17, 000, another one I did was £48,000. Entrepreneurship was more of a self satisfying module, if you like ... I'm trying to think what else I picked now.

PC – But generally that degree has had a big impact

E – Absolutely. Operations management, for example, I used when I wrote the logistics strategy for the Olympics, for the hospitality sector for 160,000 meals – if I didn't do logistics and purchasing and stuff like that at University I'd never have been able to write the document that got us in to the final two for the contract

PC – what about your **add+vantage modules**? Which ones did you do?

E – First year Spanish – always had a passion for Spain as I go over there once a year maybe – I worked in Spain before in the Basque country and had some quite cultural experience there so it just seemed sensible to add a bit of value with the language which was the purpose of the job. Second year got harder and I didn't do quite so well only marginally different but I thought 'OK, I passed' everything else I got on the year would have brought it over the first anyway. And then the third year I kind of thought 'Uhm I need to make life very easy for myself' because

work was picking up and I had to kind of keep my employment accelerating if I gave up in March, April, May and gave my thesis/ dissertation study period and didn't work I would lose so much in June, July, August I couldn't afford to – so I had to gamble. I took the employability placement – summer placement module with a colleague of mine who's up in his own business and I asked him 'well do you want to be my mentor the my business? You're your own boss, take the accounts, take what you need to do' .. we put it under his company and he acted as a mentor for eight weeks while I took on his clients. I did that, wrote the reports and screened a high first but that was one of those which I specialised in anyway.

PC – How big a help was the **Employability Learning Package**?

E – In honesty? I blanked it – the whole thing. Absolutely paid no attention to it, wanted to get it off the cards and I never read it again. I don't know if that was the answer you expected? The first year it just seemed to the content is useful in a different context. In my own personal opinion if it was delivered differently and more meaningfully then left to its own devices then you'd take on more. Similarly my only comment with the post-grad that I'm doing now is that it's all distance learning and the first thing was career development, well I had three years of career development and I got consistently high marks in and I actually practised with the local learning authority I teach basically what I'm actually studying – on a voluntary basis. When it came to project management I completely missed the taught time and completely missed some inter-action – listening to some verbally recorded PowerPoint presentation doesn't engage someone – on the same grounds as ELP I couldn't wait to get it over with.

PC – You mentioned the **career development modules**, were they helpful to you?

E – They were a hindrance to my time but they were in various areas useful. But to a point what I found with the things XX (*module tutors name*) – I found her very, very, very good, but the thing she did was turn to me for experience and knowledge to give to the class because I was six or seven years older the most of them – I think there was one girl who was the same age as me in my tutor group. So when we were talking about conflict management it was 'how many fights have you had in the workplace? Or how many times have you had conflict' – I stood in an office with a board of directors in London fighting for my seat there – conflicts not really – here in the hotel, definitely. I gave an example in my written work of a pretty much full-on bust up with one of the chefs (PC - ... working in kitchen) – you get very hot, argumentative, depressed, alcoholic or gay - I was the argumentative one! I don't think research has been done on that but I was the argumentative one – the head chef said 'you're too clever for this, get out of here. If I could sack you for being too clever I would, but I can't'. Lesson learnt.

PC – You saw those career development modules as taking away time ...

E – I found them as taking away time – I wouldn't say that I had the answers; with the marks it proved the case that – I got the higher marks because I had the experience which justified the content. Younger people on the course they'd have had to assimilate the information differently and present it to a point that they understood it. My understanding came from experience not from understanding the concepts – so for me it felt a little bit like I don't want to do this because I know it implicitly, if you like.

PC – **University careers service**?

E – I didn't have any contact with them whilst I was at (*University name*) also my mother works for the careers service in Northamptonshire, has done for a number of years, so there was other connections in that and so I've got hands on access to ...

PC – So you didn't see any need to use the University careers service?

E – Not after a while. I do keep I touch with the EPU there and I met a couple of careers advisors (*struggle to recall name, PC provides missing name*)

PC – Did you actually meet with her?

E – I met with her once at a tea and coffee sessions but no I didn't really access them, I didn't use them to look for a job or anything like that.

PC – Anything else whilst you were at University that has helped you?

E – Part of the placement thing I did was another course, YY (*module tutor name*) asked me to go and do the City and Guilds that formed part of the placement – if you do the coursework and you pass anything above a 2:1 it's going to qualify you for

this – I got 84%, it's nice to have. Where possible the tutors are looking at ways to enhance your employability by giving you those rights if you like to access.

PC – I mean you mention the EPU, did you have any contact with the EPU whilst you were a student or did it all come afterwards?

E – In third year for the placement when literally found that I could do it I phoned YY up and she said 'well can you come in like tomorrow or next Thursday, you've got two chances'. So I thought 'well yes take it'. So I went and sat in there, I was only skipping time the idea was that I wanted to be finished by November and not doing an add+vantage that was going to come anywhere near dissertation time or take up ... I looked at my timetable if you like using OMIS to work out where people were and I got away with doing two days a week every week. So my EPU contact came in then but then I found YY, not pestering me, but inviting me in for bits and pieces and what not and just found my content useful and I reciprocated and handed-back

PC – What do you actually do as your job

E – As my job now? I trade, I've got a company called 'Style Hospitality' which is my overhead company and underneath that, obviously I'm the Director, but I freelance as a hospitality manager and facility manager for a number of leading companies and smaller local companies as well, providing them full hospitality management - front of house, back of house – large scale operations which could be, in London I work for a company contracting called 'Smart' with a very good portfolio with access rights to the board. We'll do a dinner for like 1,000 people, 2,000 people and so forth, corporate hospitality at air shows in Paris and I run the contract management basically looking after a particular sector of the project looking, for example in Paris, at the board rooms and meeting rooms for 400-500 people a day coming through with the President of the company there-reporting the forty-second biggest corporation in the US, so quite significant...

PC – You've already touched on this already but you've implied that there was certain parts of the business management course which has been very helpful with all of this, but what about the softer skills stuff, like presentation skills, group working ...

E – I can give you an idea; I applied for a job at Wembley pre-University. I actually went to a meeting down there with a load of staff from Warwickshire and things like presentation skills I always found really natural thing, but again prior to university I'd had years of doing that and talking to people – wasn't particularly good at PowerPoint and making people like it which I found was the case with most of my studies as well I didn't really like learning that way, I'm quite a visual learner – but in terms of delivery, I do that now, I present to people. Taking softer skills I gained from Uni, I was part of this Olympic team last year and we did a presentation in London to the Olympic committee and I had formed the directors and I was the project co-ordinator administrator if you like to underwrite everything, and there was 42 slides on the PowerPoint presentation to the Olympic committee and -you've smiled which suggests you know what I said! I was pretty brutal with them and by the end of it by the time we got to that 4 o'clock the following afternoon we'd been up all night – all night re-writing the presentation I rewrote it, and I gave it to them the next morning and said 'I think you need to get rid of this and we're going to have run through starting now'. I tidied everything up, there was complete inconsistency.

PC – Was this part of a module?

E – No it was just something I gained. I did career development in year 1 and the criticism that I got from the tutor was that you've done too much, but the fellow students in the group, in a group scenario, said 'well if you don't do it nobody will' and my attitude was that if I don't do it you won't'. I got criticised for that but in the end it seems to have paid off.

PC – This presentation to the Olympic people, was that part of your business?

E – It's part of what I was paid as a contractor independently as team of consultants that was assembled, I was one of the junior – I still work from them now - £17m contract for a major slice of the hospitality contract, which we didn't actually win (laugh) – but there you go... 42 slides became 36 quality slides (PC – which is still quite a big!) – still quite big, but it was an hour and a half and there was nothing in there which didn't need to be said. What I said to them was 'Don't blab, they can read just as much as they can tell 'em'.

PC – Was there anything missing at University that should have been there which wasn't and would have helped you?

E – (pause) It's difficult to say, what else to put in. The first year, in all honest, I thought was awful. Not living in ZZ and being a home student and travelling in, I found that the biggest pain for me was going in one hour on Tuesday, and hour on Wednesday, an hour on Thursday, 2 hours on a Friday and then four hours on a Monday. There wasn't much more that could engage you in the time to go five days a week – what else could engage you. There wasn't much more that could engage you in the time – if I had to go in five days a week what else could engage me in the time in learning of some description that would turn a one hour trip into a two hour trip and actually gain something from the second hour that makes any sense.

Things are changing – University is changing – and there are small place for people to go - study environments and things now.

PC – Is there anything missing from University which would have been of some support and benefit to you?

E – I can recall a lecture with ZZ (*Strategic Management lecturer named*) in the last year where he brought in three ex-students of varying academic abilities – there was a guy who drank his way through there years and got a 2:2, there was a guy who was quite busy and compromised his position and got a 2:1 – compromised his ability to achieve by going to work, much like I did, and there was a guy who got a first and we were all a little bit in the sun. They're all about on the same level now in the workplace that was the only time were we have any time in the whole of the three years were we had talking to us from an employee's point o view and if I could add value to the learning of other people by sharing work experience – how you can relate the content to work I'd consider it at the start of the first year.

PC – Is that what you were doing last week in the EPU?

E – That's what I did at the EPU. I talked more about myself as an individual leaving University, as an employer, an employee, as a self employed person. But in terms of what I do with the local schools in Northamptonshire in the south of the county, I talk about how content and things relate to work experience.

PC – Do you go into local schools?

E – Yeah. I do local talks and things

PC – Do you mentor any of the pupils?

E – I've got two people in (*name of a school*) that I look after and (*name of another school*) which is in Northampton I do CV writing .. who wants to go into events management without going to University. It seems to be a big focus to me now with the fees going up and things that there's a big anti-University push in the schools, I don't agree with that at all – likewise I don't agree with the fees going up. The push I'm at is to make sure that people understand their abilities.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC - You say you're doing an MSc at the moment

E – it's a PG cert

(Brief discussion relating to University and the PG cert teaching staff)

PC – Is that just the first stage, or are you going to take it any further?

E – The reason that that came – I got phoned up by the student survey last year - which I obviously didn't have time to complete – they phoned me back and I asked if there was any opportunities for doing further qualifications the university wants us to do more than we want to pay for – this can add value to the act that we've got qualifications i.e. do you make opportunities for high achievers and they said there is this course which hasn't got the best out of university to go and get a job. I said well 'I haven't really got a job' – that's how I did it. Then XX phoned me up and asked whether I'd like to do it and I said 'yeah'. There's much content that's not geared about fulfilling employment it's very useful to. One of the attractive parts of that was that it was £100 and not £1800

PC – Oh yes, I know which course you're talking about now

E – It's got 35 people on it

PC –What are you actually planning to do in the future?

E – (laughs – pause) What I'm looking at now I had a plan until last week, part of the presentation I did to the EPU made me throw it away and think again. Now I've done what I've done – and I won't say that I've failed, but I haven't achieved the best out of what I'm doing, it goes back to what I was saying about having nerve and confidence to carry on. I've looked at a couple of things and I've met loads of interesting people through this self-employed route. My colleague that I've got this wedding with in Oxfordshire I think could lead to a very, very good partnership. I'm now looking a for a more fixed and secure deal so – I've got it in my briefcase here – an MOU for a profit share deal on anything that I can pick up that gives me the basis to work on and go and bring business in and secure commission on everything that I sell as opposed to trying to win business and not wining it and not having anything as a result of it. It also used his portfolio and company strengths to sell mine, so the wedding that I've got – well she's a journalist for a well known magazine and he's a surveyor for a well know chartered

survey's in London. So I'm working with the right people but I need to products behind me. So the relationships that I'm forming at the moment could set up a very strong future.

PC – So at the moment it's all about developing the business – you must realise that you cannot go on working for 6 months then going and enjoying yourself for 6 months ...

E – Absolutely. Essentially what I'm saying is that I get very bored when I'm sat down doing nothing – I'm quite a high need individual. So, I spent £3,000 on holiday on Australia in January, and having a very, very good time. I got back in February and I was bored, in fact I was bored halfway through the trip to Australia in all honesty, I wanted to be doing something. It's nice to do stuff like that, but there's a point where you've got to accept some sort of standard. Just briefly now I'm working with a head chef from another four star hotel - Country House just over the fields from where I live right now and he's leaving a setting business up in the north of England – I believe he's gone into going a broad but he's highly likely to take a portfolio job up in the Peak District. What he's allowed me to do is to design my own role in the organisation he almost said to me 'come and work with me' – 'well only if I can write my job, I don't want a job because I don't function under a structure that limits ability. If I could write my job that said this is what I would do, this is how I'm going to do it, this what I want to achieve and this is how I'm going to get there sort of thing – across the whole remit of operations, accounts all the different facets of the business' then I'd be kind of happy because it's be my perfect job, and he's allowed me to do that.

PC – It sounds to me like a lot of this business you've got, it all comes from contacts...

E – Yes, it's networking

PC – Networking, and is it networking from your previous experiences in catering or ..

E – (Pause) errhm

PC – Where are the contacts coming from?

E – OK. Yeah years of knowing people, picking up cards, being able to talk to people professionally. I've always had a confident speaking kind of approach, I can speak to anybody – a random individual anywhere – and not feel challenged in terms of making conversation and putting some content on there and that's how I've won some of the business that I've got. Certainly this wedding I'm doing now – its nerve to a point but its confidence approaching.

PC – But are the contacts from your previous work experience or from your family connections?

E – No family connections. My family are hopeless in terms of making a contribution to my work. I actually employed one of them once and would never do it again – my father helped me for a whole week and it was terrible . One of the things I've got ... if I don't know somebody my colleague Paul from Worcestershire he will and it's the other way round. I will get phoned up 'cause he knows someone and me will be able to deliver that. Yeah we work on basis were we know someone everywhere. The ones that I'm doing in Singapore I know people over that will, you know... I had a quick meeting when I went over to Australia ... 'I need this can you do it?' whereby the trade can be achieved and we can actually advertise ourselves on Singapore even though we're not there. Abu Dhabi I've been to a few weeks ago and so forth and we can set a whole ... it's just the sub networks business and that's how we've done it.

PC – What advice would you give to students who are setting out on this?

E – In terms of self-employed?

PC – Well may be self employed or just to get a graduate job?

E – Pay attention to the information that you're given with. I wouldn't say people's advice, careers advice is wrong – career information. Always make a decision on the information you're given and don't believe it – receive it as advice because nobody's right. YY (lecturer's name) used to say to us 'there's no one right answer but there are many wrong answers' - so don't take advice but take loads of information and then assume the best route really – may be that's YY talking! I always listen to that and thing he's right – don't take what you've been told as the right answer let loads of bits of information be wrong but find one that works out of it. So in terms of searching for graduate jobs there's probably not one right employer for you but there are probably many wrong ones – Proctor and Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser, Babcock –Babcock I really wanted to go and work with until I met their rep at the Uni careers fair in December the year before last – just that one person wrote that company of my list immediately ... (PC - because of the rep?) ... because he was absolutely awful (laughs) Babcock are a very good group, a very, very good company. I know people who've worked for them in the past and still do – but it didn't happen that day. So where they're going, stick at what they're to do till then can find the inner confidence to do it – find it and don't let it go.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – What do you think learnt about yourself through this process?

E – This is like ‘The Apprentice’!

PC – No it’s self reflection, its good practice! You’ve been successful (E – I think so), so what have you learnt about yourself?

E – If I’d put anything down to it, it’s the entrepreneurship thing (pause) I found ZZ (module leader’s name) lectures useful, very, very informative in very casual kind of way which is the way I like to learn (PC –(laughs) I’ve known ZZ a long time). The content made total reflection on myself and this need for achievement. It gave me the complete justification of why I exist as an individual. A friend of mine is one of the candidates of the junior apprentice last year – a good friend of mine. I was chatting with her the other night in a restaurant and I said ‘Do you want me to give you a bit of a rundown on why you are like you are?’ – I was just playing - and she said ‘well go on then’. ‘I’m going to take three or four attributes of you as a personality, you as an individual – tell if I’m wrong at the end, just hear me out’. It was, with some justification, it was the same. If I learnt anything I learn my dynamics, a little more about what makes me tick. The only thing I couldn’t resolve is how to cure boredom. If I do sit down – I was going to invite you to Costa in Daventry but I didn’t think you’d want to sit there to be honest with you it’s quite grim. I sit there some days thinking ‘am I a number in the street?’ The difference I wanted to achieve was to – I will be a bigger number or be a name.

PC – OK. Do you think you’re on your way to doing that?

E – I’m half way there (PC – halfway) halfway definitely

PC – So what do you need to do to make it the whole way?

E – Preserver and get busier, and again the relationships I’m making at the moment – it’s something as simple as ‘I need a business card under your company name, and then I’ll sell under your company name for you’ and within the reasons assume that I’m part of your business even though I’m not, the public don’t need to know that. Famousmart in London, I wrote a letter for someone ‘I’m your business development manager for Northamptonshire’ and assume that kind of responsibility – that would sell and keeps me happy on commission and keeps the company happy ‘cause it keeps them busy and its no cost

PC – It’s the way we use agents in the Far East – they sell our courses and take commission

E- The big thing that I’ve got is ‘business made is better than business loss - business shared is better than business loss. ‘I’d rather give you 20% of something than 20% of nothing’.

Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	2
<p>PC – We’ve not really spoken about your first class degree, has that had any impact...</p> <p>E – How far I’ve got</p> <p>PC – in your business</p> <p>E – I’d say that ... if I didn’t get a first class and get a 2:1 it was only because I took the piss, pardon my language, and jeopardised my possibility to get a first by going to work. WW (name of course director) I emailed ‘I’m going to Singapore next week’ she said ‘just be aware that you’ve got coursework’ I said ‘I know - Friday’. I spent four nights writing up and days at work and still got a first.</p> <p>PC – But has it had any impact on what you’ve achieved?</p> <p>E – If I said no to that I’d be devaluing the degree a little bit</p> <p>PC – Personally?</p> <p>E – Maybe personally, but professionally – it’s good but I’ve got the justification that I got a first class, and I challenged the status quo and I made a fortune whilst I was doing it.</p>	
Your add+vantage modules	3

E – Languages stay with you anyway. Certainly the placement thing was just a case of letting me play with what I'd got and make it work.	
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
The career development modules on your course E- I think that, as I said before, it was the experience that allowed me to qualify the reflective writing whereas as the other undergraduates were trying to qualify that with more theory – I didn't find it so hard	3
The University's careers service	1
Your family	1
Personal contacts E – There was a lot of people I could draw on to ask questions – 'where would you look for this sort of thing?' and if I wanted to find evidence. For example for the PG cert I had to use an example of project failure the other day – this would be 2 o'clock on Sunday morning – I had to give an example of major project failure and talk about methodology that I would implement, or why and I used the commonwealth games in Delhi, which was as current as I could probably be ... and they said 'yeah brilliant go with that'. PC – but in terms of your job personal contacts have been hugely important E –Absolutely. If I wasn't in contact with (contact name and company position) – I put my biography into an agent in London to get them directly - I hadn't have done that through one contact I would never have met another. He puts work my way, we work together on a lot of things, the wedding we sold, in Kenilworth -£48,000 for days wedding - I couldn't do without him and he couldn't do without me. We have a partnership now that if I bring the contract in he'll help with the job. He's very much of the view that he's made his millions and now it's somebody else's turn.	3

PC – Anything else that has had an impact on your job/ career/ being an entrepreneur

E – You put your family and personal contacts – I don't know? If I switch personal contacts into professional contacts and then put personal friends down – is that fair? (PC – Yes, whatever you feel...) a couple of personal friends have been particularly motivating. One of my closest mates, closest friend, was my form tutor at school. I went on to work with Alan in careers service, sorry the youth service, we worked together. When I was at school he was very good as a mentor and my year 10 and 11 tutor, I was involved in the youth services as a member of the youth club and he sort of said 'you could do this – do you want to do it?' Sometimes he pushed me a little 'you know if you want something ...' – the roles swung around a bit and now I teach him. I guess he's in his late 50's so I've known him for probably about 15 years something like that. We frequently meet once or twice a week for a coffee and a chat read the papers or something. The reflection on that - skills what I got right I share with him and what I've done he's kind of retired from teaching and comes and helps with some of the stuff that we do.

PC – Thank you very much

TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW : FRANK

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Can you just confirm what degree it was that you studied?

F – Business Management

PC – What class of degree?

F – 2:1

PC – You got a 2:1 OK. Did you go to University from school?

F- Yes I did, via college

PC – So you went to college

F – XX college

PC – What did you do at college?

F – I did computing, but there was a lot of Business involved. To be honest I found the business more interesting than the actual computing, so that lead me to think that I was actually better at the business side – so I kind of branched out.

PC – Was this a BTEC national?

F – It was an AVC – Advanced Vocational over two years.

PC – How many UCAS points did you get?

F – Around 200, I can't remember exactly

PC – Just to confirm that none of your parents went to University

F – No, they didn't.

PC – Any brothers or sisters?

F – They didn't go to University

PC – Anyone else in the family – aunties, uncles, cousins?

F – Cousins did yeah, two cousins went to Nottingham University.

PC – But you're the first in your immediate family

F – Yeah

PC – Wants the official title of your current job?

F – Operations project co-ordinator. I've had about 15 different job titles, my role just keeps changing constantly – it's mainly in transport, operations and basic warehouse demands – transport and looking after our fleet. Started with logistics co-ordinator as a job title *(rest of sentence inaudible)*

PC – Is that eh first job you've had since graduation

F – Yes that's right

PC – But as you said the role keeps changing

F – They still are. I'm on a week's holiday and go back next week and things are going to be different again ... it keeps changing

(Interruption)

PC – I have a simple Likert scale here. I'm just interested how big an impact each of these things actually had on getting your graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	4
Your degree class	3
Your add+vantage modules	3
The employability learning package (ELP) <i>(It emerges during the interview that interviewee F only did the level 3 ELP not the full three programme).</i>	3
The career development modules on your course	4
The University's careers service	2
F – I'll say 2 because the problem was living back up north they could only help me so much moving on from University. I actually took what is now classed as a gap year to take a work placement but <i>(next section inaudible)</i> Coventry couldn't help me find anything I wouldn't say they didn't bother, but they weren't particularly prominent. Which I could understand living 130 miles away they aren't going to find opportunities. Instead of getting any credit or support for that from the University – I didn't get anything basically. I know I had to do it get a job. <i>(These comments refer the first two years of interviewee F's degree when he was on a course in another Faculty)</i>	
INTERVIEW STOPPED AND MOVED TO A QUIETER LOCATION	
Your family	3
Personal contacts	2

PC – Anything else which has a major impact?

F – My placement .. gap year. I worked as a customer services manager for a year. I worked a year at a company that supplies my current company XX (company named). That had a huge impact really. The job I'm in, as I said to you before, is very progressive – things flying in from all different angles – I had a good business background, sorry I had a good education background with Business Management, actually going and living it for a year had a huge impact. I would have really struggled I think without doing that.

PC – You called it a gap year, was that before you went to University?

F – I did two years of Business Computing and then transferred over. As I said the second year didn't go quite as I planned as I had a chance to go away and try the business side of it again, with this job, I came back and I asked about a transfer that's where I met XX *(Business Management Course Tutor named)*.

PC – So you started doing Business Computing, oh I see, and then you switched to Business Management after taking a year out.

F – There was nothing wrong with the Business Computing course but it just wasn't for me. I wanted to learn basically things like ecommerce things like that but it was more about actual computers and things, which I obviously understand is computing but I wanted to learn how they help business and how they bring things together in business – so a lot like operations and transport. From my open day I understood that that would be some of the stuff that we would be studying but really we didn't spend any time on it so.

PC – So you did 2 years Business computing and then you did a gap year which year of Business Management did you go back into – was it the final year

F – Yeah the final year. I had enough credits to switch over.

PC – OK I understand now.

(Comments aside)

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Just going back to before you went to University, why did you go to University in the first place?

F – Ever since I can remember I wanted to. I've never been someone who's not liked education. I've always understood the meaning behind everything – you know why you do it. I always wanted to get a good job.

PC- So all the way through school and college it was just assumed that you would go to University?

F – Probably since last year of secondary school – no, sorry the since the first year of secondary school

PC – So right back at the beginning of secondary school

F – It was I've always thought that 'cause as I said to you before I've got cousins who are quite a bit older than me and they've always gone off and told me about their experiences – obviously the good ones not the bad ones – but it's always been something I've wanted to do.

PC – What about your family? Was the expectation there that you would do this?

F – Errhm. They've always known that I wanted to do it. They've always embraced the fact that I wanted to try something and go somewhere different – kick me out of the house (laughs) – but they've always said that you should try 'cause you won't get the chance in 10 years time it'll be a lot harder to study than it is now'. They supported me financially and emotionally, if you will, and yeah – they were a big help.

PC – So you originally did business computing, presumably that was just a follow on from the AVC and things ...

F- It was yeah. That's the thing, as you can see if you looked at on paper you go from computing to business computing to business management. I have a general interest in computers I used to find I'm quite good at it, I can teach people different things at work and I have a general interest in that and all technology. But I've always had a natural ability in business, you know, I'm not brilliant at it but I've always understood it. Sometimes in my last year I understand things which people had been learning for two years quicker than they were. So there was no real catch up time I always found it quite – not simple – but it always made sense to me, it always clicked straight away. I've always wanted to do it to be honest, I always felt that the business computing would turn out – ecommerce (PC – bit more business) Yeah, Yeah at least a 50-50 split but it wasn't, it was 95-5 computing really

PC – In the second year business computing did you take the year out – was that deliberately done because you'd had enough of business computing or did you intend to go back?

F – It was all part of the plan. I always thought – well to be honest when it got nearer to University time probably starting the second year of college things were starting to go against getting a job, things were starting to pile up on the side that you're going to need something more than a degree. The amount of people going to University was more and more and jobs was getting less and less, I needed something extra to try and stand out from the crowd. So I've always had that plan – I've always had a plan.

PC – So you always had a plan, you were always going to do a year's work experience as part of your degree

F – I was going to try yeah. To be honest I was very naive about the way you study at University in a way, I thought if I tell them I'll be back in a year they'll probably go mad and they'll probably kick me off! But I explained to the course leader of business computing 'it's all part of this plan, am I OK to do it?', 'Yep, see you in a year' and that it basically.

PC – Except it didn't

F – Well (pause)

PC – Why did you switch? You've sort of hinted at why you switched. (*F reluctant to answer*). You went out and did this work experience...

F – Well I always ... I had a bit of a crisis really. I came back and basically said 'you're going to have to do an extra year to do this, because you've missed a year and your credits aren't going to be enough you're going to have to do 9 modules now' and I said to him 'that's not what you said when I left' he said 'well that's the case now'. I didn't do as well as I should have in the second year, there's no doubt about that but subconsciously my interest was really waning. It wasn't a course I enjoyed doing in the second year. I got accused of plagiarism which wasn't nice and I had to sign something to say I'd done it otherwise I'd have got kicked out.

PC – Not a good experience

F – It wasn't – I found I didn't get any support at all, any lecturer tried to say it but no one really seemed that interested. As I said I tried my best – I did OK, I did average but I felt like I was still saying to people 'You know when are we getting on to Business?', there really wasn't much comeback from it, no one said 'this is where it goes into business, this is how it integrates to business' It wasn't. You had lecturers who were fantastic with computers and good at teaching but there was no real....

PC – So these problems you had when you got back were the final straw and convinced you to switch?

F – Absolutely. There was two days when I thought I was going to leave University. I thought 'I can't do two more years' it wasn't a case of 'I hate university' it was a case of ... in a way I wasn't sure how hard I'd tried in the second year but I thought 'I've really put 100% in and I'm struggling to break into the pack. I've got a problem and I don't to be two years of struggling I'd rather go and get a job'. What I said to this gentleman called YY (*Computing course tutor*). I said 'let me do 9 modules I'll work day and night I'll do it'. There were reasons in my personal life I didn't want to be a way for two years, I have a girlfriend who lives up here, I've been with her since I started University – I didn't want to be away another – I had that plan in place this was what was going to happen and 'Let me do nine modules' he said 'I can't I'll let you do 8', 'I'll try and do one in the summer' he said 'right well what do you want to do?'. So he gave me a list of modules and I said 'I'd like to do that one'. He says 'that's a business module that's pure business not computing. Feel free to go and ask if you like, you'll have to go and meet this woman XX (*Business Management course tutor*)'. So she said 'Which of my modules would you like to do?' and I said 'Those 8!'. I said what I said now 'I love learning it' and she said 'that if you're that desperate to do it transfer, I'd love to have you on my course'. The best decision I ever made.

PC – Good, good. You had a much better experience in our Faculty than in Engineering and Computing?

F – Absolutely fantastic.

PC – There's no reason why you can't do 140 credits in year

F – All I seemed to get of the lecturers, the course leader was negative stuff, no one said 'You've done bad, this is what you have to do. No one was rude about anything but they didn't seem that interested either in trying to help either so.. When I met XX is was very different, very welcoming and ... fantastic.

PC – Good, excellent. So when you started your degree did you have a career in mind? You had this plan, what was the actual end pint of this plan when you went out in to the world of work so to speak.

F – I wanted to ... I didn't have a plan as such; I knew the areas I wanted to work in. It was always logistics to be honest; I don't know why put I was always interested in it. My father works on a company where logistics is huge – he sells oil and a penny either way on the transport costs, it's a huge, huge cost. So it always interested me. The idea was to become something of a project manager which is not far what I'm off now. I'm not going to stop but ...

PC – So on reflection Business Computing wasn't the right course.

F – It wasn't. I don't want to bad mouth the university but – it's a different part of my life now – but when I went to the open day the reason why I was head over heels to go to (*university named*) was because the people said exactly what I wanted to hear. On reflection it wasn't ... it was very naive of me. But, you know, I just like computers, I enjoyed doing it, I used to build them

PC – But it wasn't how you saw your career?

F – It wasn't no. To be honest I could look round ... without being offensive - I could look round the room and just think 'I can't see myself working with people like this for the rest of my life, they're far too technical for me'. I coped, I managed, I did alright. The first year I breezed through, but when it got more and more technical I did struggle a bit. Still did OK but I wasn't enjoying it anymore.

PC – So when you were thinking about getting a job, what at that point did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle you were going to have to overcome?

F – Probably lack of experience – hence the gap year. I always felt that I'm moderately intelligent, I'm OK. But I always thought I lacked common sense, which is not – I mean my girlfriend is the same, she's twice as intelligent as me, she's got a Masters and everything – but I was so dozy you wouldn't believe it at times. I needed that grounding in work to try and get used to how things run which, again, the gap year really settled me down on that. So it's all well and good coming up with ideas everyday but if you don't know how a business works you're in trouble 'cause your ideas are just, you know, are not useful if they can't be implemented.

PC – So the fact that you filled this gap do you think that that had a big impact on – did it not prove to be because you filled the gap?

F – (pause) When I tried to get a job we were at the start of this recession no one was hiring. Now it did take me 6 months to get a job.

PC – So you tried for lots of other jobs did you?

F – 100's! I applied from everywhere up the scale from 40 grand a year to 12 grand a year and no one ... I was either under qualified or over qualified, or under experienced or ..

PC – Did you get as far as interviews for any of them?

F – I had a couple disastrous open day interviews with the likes of a company in Warrington. Basically – there're a recruitment agency – a couple of these open days where there was 40 of you sat there trying to answer the same question, trying to speak louder than the others. Disastrous because, I felt I had a good knowledge, I'd had a great year doing Business Management – I loved every minute of it – I came out and thought 'I can use this now – brilliant' and these open days where whoever shouts loudest will hear you. I've been brought up in a different way, I'm quite polite, I'm reserved, I think about things before I speak. I went to three in the end and they all said 'you're too shy'. I wasn't very professional back but I said that if you hired anyone else on that open day but I said 'if you hired anyone else on that open day you know what you're going to get. I think they'll be trouble for your company. Thanks very much for the opportunity but I wouldn't want to work in a place with people like that.'

PC – How did you get the job you've actually got now?

F – Strangely enough I applied for graduate scheme, I was desperate at the time – that sounds bad, graduate schemes aren't all bad – I applied for a graduate scheme and the next day, sorry that night, I got a phone call at about half nine at night from an agency that were putting it through. It was a woman who owed the agency and she said 'Would you like to meet tomorrow, 'yeah OK', she said 'can we meet in Blackburn at McDonalds at half eight in the morning?' (*Comments aside*) She told me about the job and obviously she was the middleman, if you will, she said 'right OK' – tested me on a couple of things. She say right 'you seem capable I'll put you forward for an interview' and that's how it went from there. It was just literally on-line.

PC – have you found out why they responded so quickly?

F- They're a good agency, they're a small agency

PC – So it was the lady from the agency who contacted you

F – Yeah she contacted me that night by phone call first 'cause no one else contacted me. Yeah. They're a small company with good contacts and I'm guessing that she got home, got on her laptop and saw someone had applied for a job so contacted me.

PC – Where did you find out about then job in the first place?

F – I can't remember the website, it was on the internet

PC – You were looking on the internet

F – Yeah. To be honest I must have 4,000 in my favourites bar to search on, it was just a general one to be honest I can't remember which one it was.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC – We've talked about a Likert scale – let's just explore those different areas a little bit more as to how useful I think they were on actually helping you to get this job. Your **degree subject** you rated quite highly didn't you (F- Yeah). Why was that? Is it because it was Business Management that you got the job?

F – It was how well rounded the course was done – going back to it, as with computing I felt like you were showing me all different sides of things. There's stuff in business that I wouldn't like to be, there's stuff that I would find boring but it was good that I know how to do it, I knew what was involved in it and that was about 5% of the course because the rest of it I loved. It showed me everything, it really did. Funnily enough it was somehow like the passion you see in my lecturers, they

believed in what they were saying. They got everyone interested in it at that stage with 2 or 3 hundred people not a word from anyone. Completely different from computing.

PC – OK and you think that that was one of the major reasons – when you had this chat with the lady in the McDonalds – that was one the of things they knew about

F – Yeah because funnily enough there was probably five interviews and I was probably at the bottom of the list because of the degree I did, they all did logistics degrees but I had the years experience of working and I think the director, my boss know, I think he was interested in see what I knew about other things, 'cause as I said it's a different role every day. I think that's proven very helpful because I've been able to adapt to things. He never throws anything at me without me knowing something about it, within reason.

PC – So he's testing you all the time. (F – Yes) but that's excellent for your own development

F- I know I'm a million times better off than when I started that job. Just because the guys had 45 years experience – he doesn't take nothing from nobody, he's a hard task master.

PC – Which **add+vantage** modules did you do?

F – I did 'Managing Change' the add+vantage modules only came into effect in my last year, I never had to do them before.

PC – Because computing didn't have them?

F – I was just never offered it to be honest with you

PC – But you must have had 10 credit modules on the programme... alright. So you did 'Managing Change'?

F – Yeah. As I said first and second year there was no really mention of it, but that might be my fault I might not have been listening...

PC – No I know exactly reason why – it's not your fault (laughs)

NOTE – Student record shows that he is correct and did not do level 1 or 2 add+vantage modules

F - Yeah, I did 'Managing Change' which was a little far out at times but gave me a different perspective and the open mindedness is what's helped me do the job I'm doing.

PC – What about the **Employability and Learning Package** in the Likert scale you gave it three

F – Without boasting this can of thing I was always researching in my personal time because I was always thinking 'what do I need to do get a job – what are they going to be looking for?' My father is a Director himself so whenever I've been going to get a job prior to me getting a car he's always driven me there and he's saying 'This is what you need, this is what you need'. ELP advanced it, but it re-enforced it as well – 'Yeah, he was right, I should have listened to him' but there was other things as well that did help.

PC – Did you realise it at the time or did you realise it afterwards?

F – After (pause – laugh) I just did thing that people asked, I didn't think too much about it but it definitely helped. Looking back its – it was one of those things I actually enjoyed doing a well - there wasn't much in the last year I didn't enjoy – it definitely helped again it gave you more ideas about what you're going in to after university, what you need to look out for, what you need to prepare yourself for.

PC – You also did the **career development** module in the final year, you gave that a four didn't you?

F – Yeah, again it was the same thing, writing CVs, performing mock interviews, interviewing people. Again I just found it useful, it was good preparation.

PC – Did you realise at the time that it was good preparation, or was it afterwards?

F – Probably at the time with that one. I mean no disrespect to the 'Managing Change' module I did enjoy it, some of the ideas were a bit wacky but I learnt that that was something I will need in my career – sorry the other module, I can't remember what it's called now but that was more for my career. That's going to help me where I get to; 'Managing Change' is going to help me when I'm there.

PC – XX does both of them

F – Yeah

PC – **University careers service**, you talked about this earlier didn't you?

F – Yeah. It is what it is, I couldn't expect too much more from location, it's probably my fault being stubborn I wanted to go back up to the North West but at the same time, rightly or wrongly they couldn't help so much.

PC – Now are we talking about the University careers service or about the Employability and Placements Unit?

F – Errr, sorry yeah

PC – The employability and placement unit, EPU?

F – Yeah

PC – They were too locally focused?

F – Let's just say that the response wasn't great when I said I wanted to work back up North, I don't think I'm the only person who has ever asked that and I won't be the last but it's quite rare and they're probably not...

PC – Two other people have said the same thing that they are too locally focused. So did you ever use the main University careers service?

F – I probably didn't to be honest, not as much as I should have, that was my fault I ... the whole thing about the gap year and going to work was an independent thing. I wanted to go and find myself a job, I wanted to know that end of university I'm able to get myself a job. It was a bit naive for me ...

PC – Anything else about your time at university that has sort of helped get this job do you think that we've not talked about?

F – (pause) The main thing was just the modules, absolutely fantastic

PC – Do you use what you learnt on the modules?

F – I've still got the notes on a pen drive

PC – So you still use them

F- Some things are relevant and some things aren't. I work for a bed company so learning about vehicles that have freezers in them wasn't a big help but at the same time I might work for Asda one day

PC – You may well do yeah

F – I can't say there's anything I did last year that has not proved useful

PC – So you use things from the logistics side, from the strategy side

F – Strategy, everything. Honestly it was ... I worked very hard, 'cause I knew I was two years behind, I had six months to get a degree basically which I you know I can't thank XX (course tutor) enough for taking me on

PC – It's not all XX you had to put the work in as well

F – I understand that but she gave me a lot of time, I'm not thick but I needed help

PC – Was she your dissertation tutor?

F – Yes she was.

PC – What about the softer side of it – group work, presentation skills? Do you use those sorts of things?

F – Definitely enhanced the work I did, just working in groups to be honest. In that last year I became a lot more confident than I was in the first two years. First two years I made some friends but I was more interested in doing the work and when the work started to become uninteresting that's when I had my problem, but in the last year I was again very focused on work but I was put with a group, or a group was put together, in a couple of modules, made some good friends out of it but it definitely

gave me leadership qualities, it gave me confidence to know I can suggest things without being shot down. It helped a lot 'cause I'm not shy anymore, I was probably... I've always thought university, naively, just put the blinkers on, focus on yourself and you'll be fine. Group work definitely helped.

PC – So what exactly does your job entail at the moment – this week!

F – Well last week ... we've just taken over another company which is XX (*mentions a bed making company*) so YY (*company name*) who I work for we're now the biggest distributor Europe now. For example on Friday I was doing the year's budgets with the logistics and operations director of XX that was difficult but, it was good fun actually. Day-to-day I do a lot of resource management so I predict our sales figures I can then work out how many vehicles we need, how many drivers we need in our different depots. I'm environment officer which is a nightmare! I can't stand it! I'm our communications person as well, I'm in charge of all our PDAs, our mobile phones

PC – Like this

F – (laughs) Yeah but ours are a lot bigger, a lot worse. They were a mess when I joined, I got put on it was 'You might know what you're doing' - to be fair there is now 100% usage which is fantastic. So it's many different things. I do routing as well for our Northern Ireland distribution centre, deliveries there, involves a lot of stopping (???) as well.

PC – So I can see what you did on the Business Management on that final year will be an immense benefit for that

F – Definitely. Again it's what I was saying before the business management module I always found common sense to me. I always thought 'Well, yeah I didn't think of it but it makes perfect sense to me' and I've always thought how well I worked because of what I learnt. It really is – I'm not just saying it because there's a recorder on – I owe an awful lot to that last year.

PC – Is there anything that you think was missing from University that would have been useful?

F – (pause) I'm probably the wrong person to ask this. As I say I was trying to be very independent so I always thought 'I'll muggle through and I'll do it myself' which I've never had a problem with doing, I never missed out on anything really, obviously the first couple of years I could have done with a helluva a lot of more support, but I can't fault the last year.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – Are you doing any further qualifications?

F – Yeah, in three weeks time I'm going to be learning French, again.

PC – Is that related to your job or just out of interest?

F – I fancy working in Europe. But in work, actually I've done an IOSH course – health and safety qualification – that's another thing I do, health and safety which is a nightmare, and I'm doing NEBOSH which one of the highest health and safety courses that you can get, I'm due to start that soon. And what's called the Drivers CPC course which is basically a competency of how you run your fleets, how your drivers do their daily business – so there's stuff on the go.

PC – Did you do the right combination of modules to get the ehrrm I can't remember the ... is it CIPFA ... the logistics, purchasing qualification

F- I did logistics and purchasing

PC – There is a professional body I think isn't there?

F – Not sure to be honest. As I said I had the meeting with XX (course tutor) and I just jumped at whatever she could give us, didn't question anything else 'cause thought 'Don't push it, like you've really landed on your feet there'.

PC – Logistics and that whole area is an area where there was a lacking of professional chartered institutes. We actually set up a foundation degree, one of the original foundation degrees nearly 10 years ago now, with one of the local colleges specifically to address this. The industry weren't just interested at all – very strange.

F – Well I'm the first graduate that YY (company name) has ever took on. The operations – my boss – the operations director now WW, XX and YY (three company names), I'm doing my job for three companies now as well – has never taken a graduate.

PC – The attitude was odd as well because a lot of the companies were saying 'Well why would we want to get somebody trained and get their qualifications 'cause they'll all just leave'.

F – Well yeah. Another thing is, we're not a huge company, you know we're a small to medium size company, well now we're a medium size company, but there a lot of things on logistics – I don't have to tell you – but you make a mistake and it's a lot of money. Rightly or wrongly people don't want to take a chance, obviously I got lucky and I did get a chance but ... You know even when I first started it was bloody hard, it was really difficult. It wasn't just the fact that you've got to do everything right, when you first start a job, or an intricate job any way, it's not always the easiest thing to do to always get everything right but you've got to do it quickly as well and you've got to move on to the next thing – it's very fast paced industry.

PC – I should have asked this at the beginning really. Did you graduate in 2009, was it last year or the year before that you finished?

F - The year before

PC – 2009?

F – Yeah.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – If you were asked back to the university to talk to our final year students what would you tell them? What advice can you give them about what they need to be doing, or what they should be doing?

F – As far as getting a job?

PC – Yeah

F – Get looking, get on the internet, get on the papers, have a look everywhere you can, but research jobs – research it. Don't have an idea about what you actually want to do. I mean obviously aim for the dream job but there's plenty of good jobs around and trying something different is a good thing. That's not a negative thing, I'm not saying your ideas are wrong but at the same time I'm probably trying something that, you know, three years ago I wouldn't have particularly thought interesting, things like the environment and health and safety but it's a decent job and it's something I enjoy going into work to do.

PC – What do you think you've learnt about yourself through this process?

F – Probably (pause) I needed to be more assertive. As I said I went to these open days and wasn't assertive enough, I found other people rude and too abrasive and too in your face, so I sat back, I didn't ... I'm not saying I didn't try or I had a bad attitude I just thought 'Let them all shout and I'll give them the right answer at the end of it', well I tried to. My theory has always been you don't have to be rude to get on in business, too many of these people have been watching 'The Apprentice' and thought they do need to stab each other in the back to get ... I found it all a bit childish but at the same time I could have done more to make myself known, make people take note of my name.

PC – OK, to make yourself stand out

F – Yeah exactly. I probably done it in actions with getting the years experience but probably haven't followed it through and boasted about myself enough at that point and probably didn't... I should have beefed up what I actually did 'cause that was a tough job that year, it really was.

PC - Thanks

AREA 1 – BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

PC – Which degree did you study?

G – BA Marketing Management

PC – What was your class of degree?

G – 2:1

PC – Did you go straight to University from school?

G – Yeah, straight into 6th Form

PC – You did A-levels at school

G – Yeah. A-levels at school and then I went straight to XX University.

PC - Which A-levels did you do?

G – Physics, Maths, IT and Economics.

PC – OK, that’s interesting. And how many UCAS points did you get?

G – I think the entry requirements were 260.

PC – And that’s what you got?

G- Somewhere around that. I made a bit of a boo-boo in terms of the A-levels I picked. I flew through GCSEs, got like one A*, seven A’s, two B’s and a C and then thought A-levels were going to be quite as easy so I picked the hardest that I could – did pretty badly at them all. On the basis that they were going to be easy ... so for example at GCSE I got double A award in Science and then took Physics which I struggled with because I wasn’t putting time into the course. Maths I got an A at GCSE and then I struggled with that again because I didn’t put time into the course. Economics was a new subject, IT I did really well on because I’m quite IT-centric in terms of my personal life and stuff like that, so that was still easy for me, but the others I didn’t put anywhere enough time into them so I struggled with them. Which ruled down the kind of number of UCAS points that I was going to achieve dramatically.

PC - So what ... did you intend to do Business Management?

G – Yeah, something along those lines. The kind of A-levels that I picked weren’t necessarily my choice in as much that my parents had a lot of involvement in my A-levels. Being the first born in the family I was the kind of test case with regards to A-levels and all that kind of stuff that my parents hadn’t done ‘cause they only did O-levels and stuff when they were around.

PC – And they didn’t go to University?

G – They didn’t go to University. So they wanted the best for me, which is fair enough and based on how I preformed at GCSEs they, with reasonable confidence, thought that I was going to make it. On reflection if I’d put enough work into it I could have done, but I didn’t on the basis of how easy I’d found GCSEs and so I struggled a hell of a lot to my AS levels and then had to retake all of them and do my A2s all in the same year which was my second year of A-levels and then after that I went off to University.

PC – You’re not the first person I’ve interviewed who made the same mistake of not realising how big a jump A-levels are from GCSEs.

G – Yeah it’s was substantial. I don’t think it was really reflected upon in enough seriousness about how big a step up ... it wasn’t impressed upon me about how big a jump it was going to be, prior to me actually doing it.

PC – Have you got any brothers or sisters?

G – Two brothers, younger brothers.

PC – Right, and are they going to University?

G – One is two years younger than me and has finished University – how long has he been out of University ... yeah 2 years so he finished last year, he's two years younger than me but he's one school year younger than me – I'm September born so I'm right at the start and he's July born so he's right at the end. He's just finished University this year and the other one could have gone to University this year but – in the September just gone – but he's undecided in what he wants to do so he's putting it off and trying to decide what he wants to do with regards to a career and everything like that.

PC – What exactly is your current job?

G – I am an SEO manager at XX (*Company name*) which is SEO stands for 'Search Engine Optimisation' and what I do is ... So for example my last job, YY (*Company name*), they provide flight deals from around the web, accumulate them, aggregate them, and then provide them to the user. So for example if you're looking for cheap flights to Florida, when you put that into Google they want to come up first when you search for them because that is where proportionally most people click. And so my job is to make sure that my website which I work for comes up first in Google for all the kind of relevant terms. So at YY it was all kind of flight related terms and in XX there are many different channels so they've got a parent website, large style gossip, all these different channels so it's about optimising each of them sites for their own respective terms.

PC – It's not the first job you've had since graduation?

G – No my first job was at YY – I would have been there for two years this summer – but I moved to XX in April, last month.

AREA 2 – THE INFLUENCE OF PRIOR VARIABLES

PC – Why did you actually decide to go to University in the first place?

G – (long pause) I suppose there's kind of two aspects to it. There's the whole not really being prepared to start my career as of yet, that's the kind of personal side of things in terms of ... I wanted to ... I was more than happy in education. I don't think I was kind of set in myself in a career that I definitely wanted to pursue, and I was quite keen, quite eager, to prolong my schooling for kind of enjoyment reasons as well. Aside from that, that's the kind of one aspect to it, on the other hand there's the whole kind of like of idea of career progress, things like that, so I turned Marketing Management. I was interested in marketing quite broadly, so I was very keen on taking that to University and learning more about it and with a kind of intention that not only kind of that helping my career but that kind of fuelling my career choice as well so that I've had more of an idea of the specific kind of marketing role that I'd be interested in pursuing as a career.

PC – So all the way through school the intention was to go to University - that was always what you were going to do?

G – I went to a Grammar School so everything was quite like academically driven and university was kind of par for the course really.

PC – So the assumption was that you would go to University

G – Yeah and there was kind of ... because of my performance when I was in Primary School, my performance in my SATs tests, I went to a Grammar School and then from there the kind of assumption always was that you would go into Higher Education

PC – And that was your assumption that is what you would always do?

G – Err – yeah it was to be fair. I was always kind of the opinion that is what I would end up doing.

PC – So you did science-based A-levels plus Economics, why did you do Marketing Management?

G – My choice of degree was purely about kind of personal preference were as my A-levels hadn't been. They had been, Physics would look good on my CV, IT would look good on a ... well IT was through personal preference really ... but Economics would look good on my CV and Maths would look good on a CV. None of them kind of A-Levels would restrict career opportunities whereas it was kind of perceived that if I'd gone and done Art, Theatre say Geography and English that might have closed a lot of doors to kind of potential degrees and potential career paths. So that was kind of the principles that my parents put forward. On reflection they're all really, really hard A-levels so I'd have picked IT, I'd have done it anyway that's personal preference, Maths, Physics and Economics I all really enjoyed, they're all difficult, I'd probably have picked say one of the three, possibly two and then done something else as a kind of subsidy to be a bit easier in terms of A-level, I'd got a much more mix of the kind of hard subjects so that I could put a lot more time into them rather than trying to balance my time between four hard subjects.

PC – When you picked your degree subject did you actually have a career in mind?

G – No, not really. I purely picked the kind of A-levels that me and my parent - more my parents – kind of picked A-levels more on the basis of what would look good to prospective employers with the kind of .. my intent ... that I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I'd done well at A-levels, I enjoyed certain kind of career paths and stuff like that and certain subjects at school but I wasn't dead set in terms of what I wanted to do with regards to a career. When you 're that kind of age all you want to do is say, you think about your career and all you want to think about is getting loads of money. So there's always that kind of influence towards say banking or finance or something along those lines, but I didn't particularly enjoy the idea of that. Because of that kind of basis everything that I did really enjoy, say for example Art and Geography and English at school I didn't really see a future in those career paths at that time which would have derived lots of money so I didn't want to put all my eggs into those baskets. So I kind of hedged my bets in terms of the A-levels that I picked which I kind of came a cropper with regards to that and I suffered for it in terms of the actual grades that I got. And then by that kind of stage I'd realised the mistake I'd made and said 'It's not going to be about grades and stuff like that, it's going to be about finding a career and something that I'm going to enjoy'. And so I looked through the kind of prospectus for lots of Universities to see what kind of courses are out there and picked one which interested me the most which was marketing. It's something that I enjoy it, kind of ... it's got influences from kind of creative aspects which I enjoy and business aspect which I enjoy as well. So it was a kind of perfect fit for me really.

PC – So from what you've said your parents were a main influence...

G – On my A –levels

PC - ... anything else – schools, careers? What about your degree subject that was your choice?

G - Yeah

PC – Were they happy with that?

G –I didn't care after I got burnt at my A-levels, I put a sizable amount of blame on them for my choice of A-levels and so I was like "I'll pick my degree course now – completely devoid of your input here and I'm telling you what I'm doing and I'm going to do it" essentially. 'Cause I'd realised the mistakes that I'd made you can't have somebody else dictating the path that your career's going to take, you've got have something which you enjoy personally otherwise it's going to get 5/10/15 years down the line and you're going to realise that you're going to be in a job that you hate and I didn't want to be like that.

PC – When you started looking for jobs, when you'd come to the end of your degree what did you think was going to be the biggest hurdle to getting a graduate level job?

G – Competition I guess.

PC – Competition – from who?

G – Other graduates, other people who hadn't been to University but had experience. Just masses of people in the labour market really and a distinct lack of jobs to be honest. I'd considered doing a placement year my course had the option of a sandwich year, but having done a bit of experience with regards to that I was becoming more and more aware of the kind of high competition and the impossible nature of...

PC – So you did the placement year you said?

G – No I researched it but didn't find one which either they'd accept me or I liked and so I didn't do it and just did my third year at University.

PC – In the end did that prove to be a problem, you've mentioned the competition, was that a problem?

G – I'd been quite proactive after ... So this was like during my second year I saw all these kinds of problems and I saw all these kind of horizons like I need to go out and do something about it. So in the summer of my second year, between my second and third, I went and got my own job, related to what I'm doing now, in a company called WW (*company name*) up in London - Shaftsbury Avenue. I went out of my way by getting in contact with them. I applied for jobs, I was really trying hard to get some kind of relevant work experience for that summer, I got it, I worked at WW all summer. The pay wasn't fantastic and because of the kind of commute, which I touched on earlier on, (*G's commute is 2 hours in from Kent*) financially it was rubbish but I knew it was kind of work experience which was going to stand me in good stead. The following year at university, it was either after the first semester or during it, my course was cut down to two days a week so it was Monday and Tuesday I had lectures, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday I was free so I took that opportunity on. I got in touch with a company in Solihull in Birmingham, went and did work experience there.

PC – Same sort of thing?

G – Same sort of thing again – went in there. That was very much more ... half the time I was doing what I wanted to do with relation to their website, half the time I had to do sales calls and stuff like that so that's where they got their value from it, there kind of perceived value of it I should say. And so I was doing that three days a week. So after seeing those of issues which I had already following the kind of work placement fiasco I made sure I went out of my way to go and get as much experience as I possibly could have and to be fair that stood me in really good stead for when I did finish university.

PC – how did you get your first job?

G – I was again applying to hell of a lot of stuff. My course finished quite early which was beneficial, it finished in May and so the very next day I had an interview for a job in London. I was going through agencies in London, kind of media agencies and this time I kind of realised that I wanted to go down SEO kind of routes. I aligned to other kinds of prospective agencies and they were kind of pitching me around. I had the bit of relevant experience at a couple of places already so that looked good. Eventually it must have been my fourth actual company I was interviewing with I got offered the job at YY and I took it.

PC – So you actually had other interviews not just ...

G – Yeah, no that wasn't the first.

PC – It was all done of the use of contacts and agencies

G – Yeah, nothing was done through the university or anything like that

PC – Any personal contacts, family friends?

G – No it was all kind of manual looking, manual kind of research.

AREA 3 – THE INFLUENCE OF ENABLING VARIABLES

PC- I'm just going to go back to when you were a student with us and what you did at university. I'm going to go through a list of things and you just tell me how useful you think these things were in actually getting the job that you eventually got. The first thing is your actual **degree subject** – marketing management was that a factor?

G – (Long pause). I'd say yes, in the respect of it looks good. A lot of employers say, on job descriptions or anything like that 'relevant degree' so that's the kind of foot in the door with any kind of interview like that. I think there's probably going to be a lot of employers who get, especially now, who get so many CVs in you've got to make sure that you tick all the boxes on that kind of bit on the JDs that they send out. So I think that if I didn't have that I'd probably be one of the ones that was immediately chucked in the bin. Aside from that kind of initial foot in the door I was quite apt at how I could manipulate kind of content of my course to make it as applicable to various different jobs as possible. So, for example, when I did come out of the University I knew the kind of job that I was doing but in the kind of climate that we was in I was applying for hell of a lot of stuff, not all SEO related some of them were more broad in kinds of marketing management and some were kind of business management. So I was being quite creative in terms of how I phrased the content of my course to make it applicable to all these kinds of different job titles in industries and stuff like that. So my degree defiantly helped my from that kind of ...

PC – What about the fact that it was 2:1?

G – Oh yeah that would have helped very much. In the same way but a lot of people say a degree ... a lot of people say a 2:1 is the kind of minimum that they want for a degree, especially for competitive jobs and stuff like that. I saw a hell of a lot of job applications which said a minimum of a first, stuff like that. They can afford to be picky with the number of students and stuff that are out there so I think you need to have it really.

PC – Were your **add+vantage** modules any use?

G – Errrrr (pause)

PC – What did you do?

G - I'm trying to remember now.

PC - They were the 10 credit modules

G - (Long pause). To be honest I can't entirely remember what I did. I know vaguely though that I picked stuff which wasn't going to interfere with the kind of workload that I was suffering elsewhere too much. So I tried to pick modules which were relatively easy in terms of how many essays, how many exams or anything like that – that were brought forward through them. But I also don't feel that I didn't pick anything which was completely like, fiction in terms of its usage I did pick things

that I thought were going to be relevant and were going to be quite useful. It might have been something like sales pitching or something like that. They'd have been something along those kinds of lines, sort of relevant to the course I was doing but they were going to be useful skills which I would probably end up using at some stage in my career. So I think they'd have definitely been things which that would have been helpful (*comments aside*). But, as far as I remember, I definitely didn't pick anything that was completely useless career wise. I tried to pick stuff which was going to be helpful but not ... wouldn't want anything that was too hard core, I wouldn't have gone done parallel equations or anything like that.

(NB checking interviewee G's record shows that he did indeed pick add+vantage modules that were essentially related to practical marketing skills)

PC – Do you remember the **Employability Learning Package/ ELP** that was part of the add+vantage modules?

G – I remember the name what it... Is that an on-line test? (PC – Yes). I primarily remember that being a bit of a hindrance.

PC – It wasn't any help at all?

G – Not that I can remember. I can remember it being a bit of aggro in the sense of having a massive form to fill out on-line. To be honest, without having a good think about it, I don't know how personally I'd have liked to have kind of employment kind of training. I don't think that an on-line kind of test is brilliant from the perspective of ... you can get all the ... you can have people make sure eyeballs are on each of the relevant parts, things like that. But that kind of on-line survey is very easy to just click, click, click next click, click, click, click..... I definitely think more kind of needs to be done to educate people about the kinds of career paths, and stuff like that, that are available. I'd have loved more information about my A-level choices with regards to how difficult it was going to be and not just picking the hardest thing. Trying to think about a degree but making sure that you're also picking stuff that you enjoy. Whether it's your jobs or your A-levels, or your GCSEs or your degree or anything like that you do better if you enjoy it. I think at the end of the day you don't want to get stuck in a job that you dislike, you want to be in a job that you like and so you ... that should be a primary goal, rather than like money or anything like that, that should be a kind of your end goal, so you should base your career paths and everything like that about something that you enjoy. Which I would kind of liked to have had portrayed to me before I made my mistake with the A-levels.

PC – On the degree there were **career development** type module were they of any benefit to you?

G – I can't really remember. I'm not entirely sure; I can't say that I remember them.

PC – They would have been things like CV writing those sorts of things.

G – That kind of stuff I think is valuable I think stuff like that is definitely of value

PC - But you don't remember doing it!

G – (Laughs) No, I don't remember doing it too well. I did really well at English for my A-level and I was always kind of the opinion that my CV was quite good. I went to a couple of CV workshops and things like that and I did get that kind of reaction back...

PC – At the University?

G – Say for example we went to, with the University, we went to ... I can't remember what it was, it was like an employer's convention

PC – At the NEC, Birmingham

G – Yes it was there. And there was like a CV workshop there and then like they gave me kind of feedback. I can't ever remember anyone criticising my CV and not saying it was good. Potentially if I'd done this kind of CV workshop it's like that they'd give me that kind of reaction as well, that's not me trying to brag or anything but that was never a real kind of concern for me because I've always felt that my CV was quite good in terms of content and stuff like that.

PC – Did you use the University **careers service** at all?

G – I don't think so, no. To be fair I probably wasn't that aware of what kind of facilities and stuff was available, probably again through no fault of the University more... It's very easy to like at University... focus on what's happening there and then. So for example in the second year, although I was researching courses and placement years and everything like that, the likelihood is that would be, kind of... I'd be sitting there and realise I should really be doing this and I'd kind of sit there and do it myself, rather than being proactive about it per se. I wasn't that kind of student in that sense in that I was particularly well

organised or anything like that, which is my own kind of fault. The information was there, I won't say the University has probably got any fault in that kind of perspective just more ...

PC - ... it's more down to you

G - Yeah.

PC - Is there anything else while you were at University that you feel had an influence on you getting that first job?

G - I had a ... E-marketing module on the course. That wasn't about specifically about SEO but it was about on-line marketing which I found really interesting, it tied back into my personal interest in IT and everything like that. So that kind of resonated with me even more which probably was a big contributing factor in the way my career went from there, even though that wasn't a, kind of, content of the module. I think like the experience of being at University is incredibly valuable in terms of growing you as a person, I don't think you could really put a price on that. I've got friends now who, like, went straight to work and stuff like that and they're yearning for the kind of experiences and stuff that I've had at university, and I've met people from different walks of life and all these different things. The kind of diversity of university's is that you meet all these people and I've got experience with all these people and (*comments aside relating the University*). That's the kind of experience that will stand you in good stead; it grows you up as a person.

PC - So do you think that the actual degree course itself was good preparation for what you're doing, not just the subject - you've mentioned e-commerce - but all the softer skills, the presentations you did, the group work...

G - (Pause) Yeah I think so. I think it was more kind of an expansion of what I got at school. Because I went to a Grammar school I was kind of the opinion that I got quite a good schooling. I did touch on all those kind of things at school which obviously stood me in good stead for when I did that kind of stuff at university and then from there it went on into my career because I knew how to put together an impactful presentation, I knew how to give a sales pitch, I knew how to ... like the kind of fundamentals of business.

PC - So you were quite confident before you went to university?

G - I was quite confident

PC - Doing a presentation in front of the class didn't ... wasn't a difficulty?

G - No, for me that wasn't an issue, for some other people I certainly think it would have been. For other people there was definitely more of an impact there.

PC - Do you use those sorts of skills in your job? I mean I have this image of you just sat there messing with websites all day.

G - No like with any kind of business on-line, or with any kind of business generally, there's obviously a lot of stakeholder buy-in through other parts of the company. If you want to get any change you have to put forward a business place product - all those kinds of things. If ever you get to a position of, like, reasonable responsibility within a business then all these different aspects fall upon you to lead them, manage them, present them if necessary and all these kinds of aspects. So these are all skills that I kind of draw upon now with regards that I have to make presentations to other people around the business, I have to be comfortable talking to different levels of the business whether they be junior employers or VPs or anyone like that. The skills I've learnt in terms of working with groups and all kinds of things that have been developed while at University where you do meet people that you won't get along with normally, like you won't get along with on a kind of personal level but you have to get, kind of, familiar and work with them to complete a project. All these kind of things which, like, develop you as a person and develop your ability to do the job. Yeah they're kind of invaluable in terms of ... I learnt a bit at my secondary school developed it further at University. Yeah they're crucial in terms of doing a job.

PC - Is there anything missing from your course that you think would have been useful? Just generally from the experience at university.

G - (Pause). As vocational as my course is I'd have liked perhaps a bit more of a, kind of, vocational ... even more vocational aspect to it, make it a bit more practical in the sense of ... Marketing was great in the that it was covering advertising and supply chain, pricing all these different aspects of a product and they had a piece of software, a programme, that they had just as I left where you had to set the price and stuff, I can't remember what it is. We did that as an exercise and that was entertaining, that was fun, we had to go away and do that as a group make decisions and stuff - fantastic! But that concept could be applied so much greater. So, for example, when you're looking at something like the marketing course in general you could look at something like a newsletter, and the newsletter seems an incredibly simple concept but there are so many aspect to it with regards to monetising the newsletter, who you send it out to and how you get user acquisitions to the newsletter and kind of branding purposes and how it's involved in a company's website. All this incredible diversity in that

single aspect of advertising or marketing but we might have – I can't remember exactly – but we might have had newsletters, for example, touched upon but it would have been fantastic to have to go away and, like, have explained all these different kind of stake holder and who's interested and who's got an input on this kind of thing in an actual business and like get an example, kind of, take that away and do an example in a group, something like that.

PC – So more practical

G – Yeah. Theory's fantastic but I know for a fact that I learnt a hell of a lot of theory which might have been ingrained, kind of, subconsciously in terms of I have got an idea of how businesses should be operating, or I've got an idea about how an advertising campaign should be put together, but I know there are a lot of things like say there was an acronym the 4 Ps, or the 7 Ps, something along those lines. For the life of me I couldn't dictate the 7 Ps but the kind of fundamental principles behind it I understand. Whereas it would have been great to ... whereas if I'd made a newsletter or I'd done some SEO, or I'd done some advertising or something along those lines I'd remember. I'd remember, like, the kind of lessons learnt from doing that which is a ... I think I've have learnt a hell of a lot more, like I've worked at XX, I've worked at YY, but I've also done freelance ,stuff myself at the same time as doing my job and I've learnt probably just as much doing the freelance as I have in the jobs. I'm really kind of a firm believer in the idea that the best way to learn is by doing it. I think I'd have like to have seen that integrated more into my course.

AREA 4 – ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRADUATE IDENTITY

PC – Are there any plans to do any additional qualifications? Is it an industry based on experience and profile?

G – Yeah it kind is very much like that. There are qualifications that I could do like say, for example, analytics of a website are incredibly important. Google have their own, kind of, analytics package that you can apply to your website. You can get qualified in that analytics like a little Google qualification. Something I could, it wouldn't really benefit the job that I'm doing, might learn a little bits and bobs but everything that I need to know I've already learnt myself.

PC – And are you going to stay doing this job? Have you got a career plan?

G – Errm. The career's a bit kind of difficult to foresee in terms of how it's really going to pan out because with the job that I do there's a kind of hierarchy in terms of SEOs. I'm a traffic channel into a website, people clicking from Google on the listing is a traffic channel and then there's also the advertising on Google are a separate channel, there's also newsletters , display / advertising , there's all these different aspects to the a website's traffic and then there's branding and stuff like which sends traffic direct to the website. I can get, if I work in-house as in I'm do my job in XX for their websites, I can get as high as I can as in SEO but then I'm going to get to a kind of glass ceiling in terms of the next step up is going to be a director of traffic kind of stand point wherein I'd need experience of newsletter, advertising display all these different aspects as well as SEO to get a kind of fair reflection on traffic as a whole. So that's a bit of, potentially, a concern in terms of there might be a limit how far I can get in just SEO itself. On the other side if I worked for an agency, websites would come into my agency asking for SEO services the likelihood is that I'd be more in a kind of like account manager role for that client and so the likelihood is that I'd have a lot more input on their newsletter or their APT, all these different aspects so it might be quite a good way to get experience in these different

PC – So you see yourself staying in this area?

G – Err yeah I think so to be honest. I enjoy it. It's fun.

PC – That's half the battle if you enjoy

G – I do enjoy it. It's got quite a lot of diversity in terms of the career role. There's lots of different parts to the job, some which I enjoy more than others, but there's enough that I enjoy so that I enjoy the job.

AREA 5 – SELF REFLECTION BY INTERVIEWEE

PC – OK let's assume XX (*marketing course director*) contacts you to come back and do a talk for our final year students. What advice would you give those final year students?

G- Are they doing Marketing Management?

PC – Say they're doing Marketing Management, final year – they all want graduate level jobs – what advice would you actually give them from your experience?

G – I think I'd focus primarily - or tell them to focus – on getting some experience regardless of whether that's paid or voluntary or whatever it is, get some vocational experience. Because like having done as much learning as I have, in terms of having gone through schooling and the university and stuff like that, there's still so much that you don't learn with regards to

just day-to-day working in an office, or day-to-day doing any kind of job. There's so much you couldn't possibly learn in a degree which you just learn through experience. So you need to get that experience and once you've got that experience it's so much easier to go into a job interview and say 'Yeah we was doing this' or come up with a different example or talk about any kind of area, like just day-to-day office life which you've already got experience so it's easy to talk about. My younger brother, he did worse than me at GCSEs, he did considerably better than me at A-levels 'cause he picked A-levels which were suitable – he did take Maths but then he also took other ones that were more, kind of, suitable, what I'd have ideally done. So, thankfully he learnt from the experience I had. He did that, he did a lot better at A-level than I did, he went to Leicester which is obviously a red-brick university, he Finance and Business and he got a first in that from Leicester. So he's got, like, a phenomenal degree from a phenomenal university. But he's come back and he's really struggling to get into business and finance and get any kind of job there.

PC – Because he hasn't got any experience

G - And aside from the whole credit crunch kind of thing it **IS** (*heavy emphasis*) because he has not got any kind of experience. So whereas he came home from university, and he had a part-time job in Morrisons before he went to university, every time he came home for the summer he worked the summer on the checkouts or in the chillers refilling cheese or whatever it was he was doing. But that was the easy option and that's what he did. Whereas at University he might not have had three days a week because his degree was at such a harder university and such a harder course, he probably wouldn't have had the time to take out and do part-time work while he was at university. But he could have come home and got himself experience during the summer – even if it was unpaid or whatever it was - but he didn't do it, there wasn't any kind of proactive aspect to it and he's paying for it now 'cause he's doing a temp job, which is reasonably well paid to be fair, but it's only a temp job there's no kind of career there for him. And I think he's paying for the lack of any kind of experience which he hasn't achieved and even though I've got a worse degree like, all these kinds of things, because of that experience I went and got myself I've done better out of it in the short term than he has.

PC – What do you think that you've learnt about yourself through this experience?

G – I think I've been a lazy bastard at various stages of my life! You learn to time manage myself a lot better, that wasn't necessarily while I was at university, I still ... last minute deadlines and all these kind of things, they were still present in my degree and how I did my degree. Since I've done a job I've become a lot more structured in terms of how I manage my time and stuff like that, which is incredibly useful skills to develop. I think I've kind of learned where my talents lie in terms of dealing with other people, like putting forward an argument, like a structured argument which is balanced and stuff like that. Which to a fair amount did come through working in groups with people from different backgrounds, different cultures, stuff like that, whilst at university. It is a really good experience for dealing with other people because like I say you do come across people which really you don't like at a personal level but you have to work with them because that's a part of your module and your course and so you've got no other choice. I think you learn a lot about kind of management techniques as well when you're in that kind of scenario 'cause you can't do all the work yourself you have to delegate, or you have to share ideas as a group all these different aspects which are incredibly important in terms of how you get on within a business as well.

PC - Assess the impact of the following on achieving my graduate job

1. No impact	2. Slight impact	3. Some impact	4. Big impact
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Your degree subject	3
Your degree class	3
G but like I say it does cut you out of a lot of opportunities	
Your add+vantage modules	2
The employability learning package (ELP)	1
The career development modules on your course	2
The University's careers service	1
Your family	2
Personal contacts	1

PC – Anything else?

G – Personal, kind of, effort in getting out and, kind of, being productive in getting myself experience and stuff like that, that's a 4.

PC – OK that's it, thank you very much.

APPENDIX 4

Figure 1 Direct Prior Variable – Entry Qualifications

Interviewee	Education immediately prior to University	Entry Qualification	UCAS points
A	College plus one term at another University doing Linguistics	A-Levels (English Lang, Business, Sociology)	340
B	College	BTEC National in Business	320
C	6 th Form	BTEC National in Media	320
D	6 th Form	A-Levels (Business, Sociology, Psychology)	200-220
E	College seven years before	Mature student – entry by interview	-
F	College	AVC Computing	200
G	6 th Form	A-Levels (Physics, Maths, IT and Economics)	260
1	6 th Form	A-Levels	270
2	6 th Form	A-Levels (Business, IT, Physics and Maths)	200
3	6 th Form plus one term at another University doing Business Mgt	A-Levels	240

Figure 2- Summary of Indirect Prior Variables

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	1	2	3
Family background	First in family. Educated at home until 15.	First in family.	First in Family. Parents had no formal qualifications	First in Family. Father production line worker at Jag.	First in family. Father completed an apprenticeship.	Two cousins at University. Father Director of a logistics firm.	First in Family. Parents educated to O-levels.	Father, Grandfather, Uncle and seven cousins all went to University	Father has degree and mother HND. All cousins at University. Father has senior post in B'ham council	Mother and Father have degrees. Mother and father are both teachers

Decision to go to University	Was always the intention to go to University	Initially looked for a job, but decided to improve qualifications to find a job she was more interested in	Wanted to get a good job with lots of money. Influences from her Mum, Friends and to a lesser extent her teachers	Influence from contacts he had in the Police which was his original career aim. Influence from 6 th Form tutor as he had originally intended to join Police after A-Levels/Support from mother and Father but no evidence that they were a influencing factor	Dissatisfaction with existing jobs in catering. Reference made to friends/colleagues and to sister.	Had always intended to go.	Assumption had always been that he would go to university	Assumption had always been that he would go to university	Assumption had always been that he would go to university	Assumption had always been that he would go to university
Choice of Degree	Some influence from Mum, but also from her one work experience	Business Studies teacher was an influence – but insisted that the choice was mainly hers	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice	Interviewees choice
Influence on Graduate Labour Market entry	Had previous work experience in retail and Health care	None referred to	Had worked relevant work experience plus work experiences as part of college course	None referred to	Had worked FT in the catering industry	None referred to	None referred to	Various jobs – makes explicit comment to use of contacts to obtain them	Had tried unsuccessfully to obtain a WP through a placement agency prior to joining University	Had various FT and PT jobs. FT was found through a sister's friend

DIRECT ENABLING VARIABLES

Figure 1 Direct Enabling Variables – Degree and Degree Class

The following colour coded key is used for the rest of the variables in this section

++	Strong impact identified of having the named degree/ degree class
+	Some impact identified of having the named degree/ degree class
(+)	Degree/ class not relevant but has been helpful in their job
(-)	No impact on gaining graduate level job, but potential value recognised
-	No impact
	No information

Interviewee	Degree	Class	Impact of degree	Impact of Class	Likert - Degree	Likert - Class
					3.7	3
A	Business Mgt	1st	++		4	4
B	HRM	2:1	++		4	4
C	Marketing Mgt	1st	(+)	+	3	3
D	Business Mgt	1st	++	+	4	4
E	Business Mgt	1st	++		4	2
F	Business Mgt	2:1	++		4	3
G	Marketing Mgt	2:1	+	++	3	3
					(3.7)	(3.3)
1	Business Mgt	1st	+	-	4	4
2	Business and Acc	2:1	++	(-)	4	1
3	Business Mgt	1st	+	++	3	2
					(3.7)	(2.3)

INDIRECT ENABLING VARIABLES

Strength of impact key:

++	Strong impact identified on gaining graduate level job
+	Some impact on gaining graduate level job
(+)	Some impact on gaining graduate level job, but not realised until later
(-)	No impact on gaining graduate level job, but potential value recognised
-	No impact

Figure 2 Indirect Enabling variable - Add+vantage modules

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
			2.5
A	Yes, but only level 3	+	3
B	No impact	-	1
C	Yes, lead directly to job	++	4
D	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
E	Used work experience in friend's business	(-)	3
F	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
G	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	2
NFG			(2.7)
1	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	3
2	No impact, but of value in the job	(-)	2
3	No impact	-	1
			(2.0)

Figure 3 Indirect Enabling variable - Employability Learning Package (ELP)

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
			1.4
A	No – generic and no value seen. Something you did just to get done	-	1
B	No. Question provoked a laugh. Done elsewhere	-	1
C	Question provoked a laugh. Concept was good but not the way it was presented. Waste of time.	(-)	1
D	Good way of getting you to think about jobs	+	3
E	Paid no attention to, did to get it out of the way	-	1
F	Didn't think much about it at the time, but realises now that it was of use	(+)	3
G	Couldn't really recall ELP	-	1
			(1.6)
1	No. Question provoked a laugh.	-	1
2	No. Waste of time	-	1
3	Struggled to recall ELP	-	1
			(1)

Figure 4 Indirect Enabling variable - Career Development Modules

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
			2.6
A	Yes	++	4
B	Content helpful and lead to work experience opportunity	(+)	2
C	Yes – but didn't realise it at the time	(+)	2
D	No, but admits that if he'd taken more notice then it would have been helpful	(-)	2
E	Saw the value for other people	(-)	3
F	Good preparation, but didn't realise at the time	(+)	4
G	Saw the value of them, but couldn't remember them	(-)	2
			(2.7)
1	Not sure, but identified some value	(+)	3-4
2	Course didn't include career development modules	-	2
3	Struggled to remember them, but could be very good	(-)	1
			(2.2)

Figure 5 Indirect Enabling variable – the University Careers Service

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact	Likert Score
			1.4
A	No, because the career modules were so good	-	1
B	Never used them	-	1
C	Sought help but has a bad experience and never used them again	-	1
D	Never used them, well advertised but he didn't feel the need to go	-	1
E	No contact with them	-	1
F	Wanted to get the job himself	-	2
G	Wasn't aware of what was available	-	1
FG			(1.1)
1	Not used	-	1
2	Didn't know about them	-	1

3	Seen as a major impact	++	4
			(2)

Figure 6 Indirect Enabling variable - Course-based employability skills

Interviewee	Comment	Strength of Impact
NFG		
A	Useful in the job, built up confidence	(-)
B	Question not asked	
C	Presentation as part of interview, other skills useful	++
D	Links directly to job	++
E	Has used the skills as part of his work	(-)
F	Gave them confidence	++
G	Useful in the job	(-)
FG		
1	Presentation skills important in interview	++
2	Useful in the job, built up confidence	(-)
3	Useful in job	(-)

Figure 7 – Indirect Enabling variable - Relevant work experience whilst at University

Interviewee		How obtained	Strength of Impact
NFG			
A	Continued with pre-University jobs in retail and Health care	Not clear	(-)
B	Obtained a voluntary WE in her final year	Contacted by interviewee after module presentation	++
C	Worked as a student ambassador	Interviewee applied	++
D	Worked PT for post-graduation employer	Interviewee applied	++
E	Developed his own business whilst a student	Lead by interviewee	
F	Gap year and worked FT	Interviewee application	+
G	Summer placement plus worked during final year 3 days a week	Interviewee application	++
FG			
1	Worked at ambulance service and behind a bar	Both obtained through personal contacts	+
2	Placement year plus worked as a receptionist in the EPU	Interviewee application	++
3	Returned to one of his pre-University employers on a PT basis. Week WE in final year	Not clear – long-standing contact with the employer Contact from course presentation	+

Figure 8 – Indirect Enabling variables - Other Impact Factors Identified by Interviewees

FG	
A	Dissertation, competition from with her peer group
B	Contact with tutors
C	Personal tutor, help from disabilities office
D	Course tutor
E	Module tutor
F	Unaccredited work placement in gap year
G	Work experience during course
NFG	
1	Nothing from University
2	Placement and tutors
3	Work experience and tutors

Figure 9 – Indirect Enabling variable - Potential Impact Factors that were Missing

FG	
A	Mock assessment centres, personal tutors, more application of theory to practice
B	Nothing – course covered everything
C	More emphasis on practical skills and less on theory, more help and support from personal tutors in finding jobs, more one-to-one careers support
D	Successful previous students as guest speakers
E	Successful previous students as guest speakers
F	None identified
G	More practical/ vocational course and less theoretical
NFG	
1	None
2	More on CV writing
3	More on CV writing and assessment centre support

SECONDARY CODING: THE WIDER ISSUES OF LABOUR MARKET ENGAGEMENT

Figure 1 - Engagement with the Graduate Labour Market

Interviewee	
A	Job obtained through competitive interview at home university. Other management posts applied for but without success.
B	Only graduate post applied for, vacancy seen on University website
C	Job obtained through competitive interview at home university. One other job interview turned down.
D	Employed by company he had been working for PT during his time at University. Original PT post obtained by responding to advert. Graduate schemes applied for but no interviews.
E	Built-up his business through use of existing contacts in the industry.
F	Applied for lots of jobs through websites etc. Attended some open interview days without success. Job finally gained through on-line application.
G	Applied through agencies for SEO jobs. Obtained job on fourth interview.
1	Started at company PT. Found out about the job through a friend of her Mum's
2	Returned to work placement employer. Original WP post through mail shot to potential employers
3	Post obtained through competitive process. However major influential factor was previous FT experience in the industry and that post was obtained through the sister of a friend.

Figure 2 - Perceived and actual impediments

Interviewee	Perceived	Reality
A	Time to do the applications	Was an issue. Took a very focused approach
B	Competition from other graduates with better grades and more work experience	This wasn't an issue but she had addressed the lack of WE. Felt she succeed because of her attitude towards the post – she was willing to learn and was not just interested in the money
C	Getting work experience. University you came from. Being dyslexic.	Wasn't an issue. Go the first job applied for, but it was mainly due to WE whilst at University.
D	Competition from: graduates from 'better' universities; people with FT work experience; people with life experiences; people who have been made redundant	Was a problem but interviewee got a post based on PT employer when a student.
E	Competition and his age.	Confidence to carry on doing what he's doing
F	Competition. Number of people leaving University. Lack of work experience.	Had addressed lack of WE – but took 6 months and '100's' of applications
G	Competition and people with more work experience.	Had addressed the lack of WE by the time he graduated.
1	Time to do the applications	No jobs applied for whilst at University. Graduate job came through being PT at the company on graduation
2	Poor A-Level results	Was an problem so ended up applying for non-accounting jobs
3	Poor A-Level results. Quantity of graduates.	Relevant work experience

Figure 3 - Advice to students about to enter graduate labour market.

Interviewee	
A	Start as early as possible and prioritise. Get some work experience
B	Get a work placement, even if it's on a voluntary basis
C	Get some work experience and make sure you have the correct qualifications. Have a good CV and had practise at doing interviews.
D	<i>Question not asked???</i>
E	Take notice of all the information you're given and make your own decision.
F	Don't start with a fixed idea about what you want to do. Get looking and researching jobs.
G	Get a work placement, paid or voluntary basis
1	Be confident in what you're good at – network as much as possible
2	Keep your options open and apply everywhere
3	Apply early and gain as much work experience as possible

Figure 4 – What have the interviewees learnt about themselves

Interviewee	
A	That I could actually do something [...] that I could achieve, quite highly, and have the motivation to keep going all the way through" (220-222)
B	"Not just to accept no as an answer [...] having a bit of your own common sense to it." (180-184)
C	"That I can do anything" (266)
D	"Not to be so narrow minded in my career options, opening your doors a bit more. I've actually learnt how flexible I am and can adapt to situations" (257-258)
E	" ... a little more about what makes me tick" (355)
F	"Probably (pause) I needed to be more assertive." (328)
G	"I think I've been a lazy bastard at various stages of my life! You learn to time manage myself a lot better" (322)
1	" I still don't know what I want to do (laugh)" (210)
2	"I'm a lot more confident now" (260)
3	"... probably that nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it" (394)

APPENDIX 5

BES: DLHE Data for UK-domiciled Honours Degree 2006-07 Full-time Graduates

dataset does not include graduates of Enhanced First Degrees

Summary

	Positive	Positive	Ratio to ave	
First	24	0.73	1.34	
Upper Second	81	0.55	1.01	
Lower second	63	0.49	0.90	
Third	6	0.60	1.10	Excl - No. too low
	Average	0.54		

COURSE DETAILS	PERSONAL INFORMATION			ENTRY	GRADUATION	EMPLOYMENT	FURTHER STUDY	DESTINATION
Dept	Age band at 1st Dec 2006	Gender	Ethnicity Grouping	UCAS Tarriff Points	Honours Class	Level of Employment	Further Study Circumstances	Level of Destination
EFA	Under 24	M	Chinese & Other Asian	210	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	210	First	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	310	First	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	Mixed	No Information	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	280	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	220	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	Under 24	M	White	320	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	Under 24	M	White	250	First	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	280	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	220	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	24 or over	M	South Asian	300	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	No Information	First	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive

GED	Under 24	F	White	120	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	F	Other & Unknown	290	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	300	First	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
GED	24 or over	M	White	240	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	24 or over	F	White	No Information	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	24 or over	M	White	240	First	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
HRM	Under 24	F	White	240	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
HRM	Under 24	F	White	300	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	300	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	350	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	No Information	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	24 or over	F	Black	No Information	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	24 or over	F	White	No Information	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	24 or over	F	White	160	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	24 or over	F	White	No Information	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
MKT	Under 24	M	White	280	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	F	White	300	First	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	No Information	First	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	Black	260	First	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	400	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	440	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	200	First	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	210	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	150	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	130	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	150	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	Under 24	F	White	250	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	210	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	260	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt

EFA	Under 24	F	White	220	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	180	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	100	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	24 or over	M	Black	170	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	24 or over	M	South Asian	220	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	24 or over	M	Black	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	24 or over	M	Black	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Part-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	180	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	M	White	200	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	F	White	260	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	M	White	220	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	260	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	F	White	260	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	M	White	200	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	240	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	330	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	24 or over	M	White	40	Lower Second	Not working	Part-time study	Exempt
GED	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	160	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive

HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	190	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	M	White	250	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
HRM	24 or over	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
HRM	24 or over	F	Black	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	220	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	220	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	220	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	210	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
ISS	Under 24	F	White	140	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	South Asian	210	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	190	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	240	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
ISS	Under 24	M	Chinese & Other Asian	240	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
ISS	Under 24	F	White	290	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	440	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	South Asian	80	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	240	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative

ISS	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	140	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	Mixed	250	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	240	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
LAW	Under 24	F	White	230	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	Black	100	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	290	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	M	White	300	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	360	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	White	220	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	420	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	280	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	360	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	240	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	220	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	300	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	350	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	320	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive

LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	240	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	White	250	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	Chinese & Other Asian	180	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	280	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	200	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	160	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
LAW	Under 24	F	White	360	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	24 or over	M	Black	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	24 or over	F	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
LAW	24 or over	F	White	160	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	24 or over	F	White	260	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
MKT	Under 24	M	Black	200	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	Under 24	F	Black	220	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	Under 24	F	White	150	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	M	South Asian	120	Lower Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
MKT	Under 24	F	White	200	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	Under 24	F	White	370	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive

MKT	Under 24	M	South Asian	100	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	F	White	200	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	24 or over	M	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	370	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	190	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	200	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	150	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	190	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	290	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	310	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	200	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	100	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	Chinese & Other Asian	230	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	220	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	250	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	230	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative

SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	40	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	240	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	160	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	220	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	300	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	White	300	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	160	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	300	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	260	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	140	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	40	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	300	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Lower Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	200	Lower Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	Black	100	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	Black	80	Lower Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	180	Lower Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt

SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	80	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	190	Lower Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	40	Third	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	540	Third	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	240	Third	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	220	Third	Not working	Part-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	White	220	Third	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	200	Third	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	340	Third	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Third	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	260	Third	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	280	Third	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Third	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	220	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	240	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	300	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	Chinese & Other Asian	460	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	South Asian	320	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
EFA	Under 24	F	Black	240	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	240	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Negative
EFA	Under 24	M	White	270	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	330	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	350	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	Black	370	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	White	360	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative

EFA	Under 24	F	Black	360	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	White	180	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	360	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
EFA	Under 24	F	South Asian	240	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	Under 24	M	White	400	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	Under 24	M	White	160	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
EFA	24 or over	F	South Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
EFA	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	370	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	M	White	390	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	300	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	260	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	F	White	220	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	F	White	280	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
GED	Under 24	F	White	480	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	Under 24	F	White	330	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	F	South Asian	210	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
GED	Under 24	M	White	160	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
GED	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt

HRM	Under 24	F	White	410	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	M	White	180	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	160	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
HRM	Under 24	F	White	180	Upper Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
HRM	Under 24	F	Black	200	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
HRM	Under 24	F	South Asian	120	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	260	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	South Asian	280	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	Black	250	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	290	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	410	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	260	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	Mixed	260	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	370	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	240	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	South Asian	330	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	200	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	M	White	180	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative

ISS	Under 24	M	White	410	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	300	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	230	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	M	Other & Unknown	220	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	Under 24	F	White	220	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
ISS	Under 24	F	White	300	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
ISS	Under 24	F	White	160	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	24 or over	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
ISS	24 or over	M	White	260	Upper Second	Not working	Part-time study	Exempt
LAW	Under 24	F	White	320	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	260	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	360	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	220	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	180	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	180	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	380	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	340	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive

LAW	Under 24	F	Black	330	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	240	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	South Asian	340	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	330	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	M	White	340	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	Black	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	Under 24	F	White	260	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
LAW	Under 24	M	South Asian	310	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
LAW	Under 24	F	White	260	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	24 or over	M	Chinese & Other Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
LAW	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
MKT	Under 24	M	Black	250	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
MKT	Under 24	M	White	120	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	M	South Asian	20	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	F	White	110	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	Under 24	F	South Asian	210	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
MKT	Under 24	M	South Asian	160	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
MKT	Under 24	F	South Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	White	240	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	120	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive

SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	140	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	280	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	100	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	140	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Part-time study	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	380	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	120	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	220	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	Chinese & Other Asian	220	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	200	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	200	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	220	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	Mixed	230	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	Chinese & Other Asian	120	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	450	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	280	Upper Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	F	White	290	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative

SAM	Under 24	M	White	340	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	Black	300	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	310	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	200	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	160	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	140	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	250	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	Black	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	180	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	290	Upper Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	White	220	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	300	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Not answered	Exempt
SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	230	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	80	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	White	330	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	330	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	110	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	South Asian	110	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive

SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	No Information	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Part-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	White	310	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	180	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	F	Black	190	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	160	Upper Second	Not working	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	South Asian	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	F	Black	180	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	180	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	Under 24	M	White	140	Upper Second	Graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Positive
SAM	Under 24	M	White	250	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	24 or over	M	Black	No Information	Upper Second	Not working	Full-time study	Positive
SAM	24 or over	M	Black	320	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative
SAM	24 or over	F	White	No Information	Upper Second	Non-graduate Level Employment	Not studying	Negative

APPENDIX 6

[NAME OF INSTITUTION]

FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

EMPLOYABILITY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The University Context

[name of institution] has a declared commitment to enhancing the employability of our graduates. Employability is implicitly embedded in the university's mission statement with the statement that our courses are designed so that students:

“Become enterprising and entrepreneurial graduates, contributing to innovation, creativity and productivity in their organisation or community of practice”

Employability is also one of the key 2010 tests that have been set by the university, specifically in the commitment to have:

“Rolled out innovative, imaginative and vocationally relevant courses in all areas of the curriculum, and improve the quality of the wider student experience, so that we have improved the up-take into graduate jobs from 60% to 70%”.

The measure which has been adopted for this test is the DLHE returns measuring the proportion of our graduates in graduate level jobs.

In terms of the a definition of employability the University has adopted the following definition

“Employability is a set of competencies that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation(s), which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”

Underpinning Principles of the BES Strategy

The over-riding aim is to achieve the 2010 test of 70% of graduates entering HESA defined graduate level jobs. The latest 05/06 data for BES shows that at the moment BES has 61% of graduates entering HESA defined graduate jobs. There are wide variations across the Faculty's academic Departments ranging from 35% to 88%.

The framework, and underlying principles, developed within BES has been informed by the work of the LTSN generic centre 'Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team' (ESECT) and the USEM approach to employability (see appendix 1).

The principles underlying the BES strategy are:

Subject Understanding (U)

- To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the necessary intellectual skills to succeed in their discipline area
- To provide an innovative and up-to-date curriculum to produce graduates whose subject knowledge is relevant and current
- To develop teaching, learning and assessment strategies which encourage complex learning and enhances employability

Skilful Practices (S)

- To develop subject specific employability skills
- To provide opportunities to develop non-subject specific employability skills
- To help and support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities which enhance future employability

Personal qualities (efficacy beliefs) (E)

- To make students aware of future potential graduate career paths
- To raise student aspirations in relation to their future career goals
- To provide a positive and supportive environment for students to explore future career paths
- To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the employment search skills necessary to achieve their career goals

Reflexivity (metacognition) (M)

- To provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and future development
- To encourage students to recognise their achievements and the contribution these make to their employability
- To encourage students to showcase their achievements and abilities to potential employers

Implementation Framework

Subject Understanding (U)

To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the necessary intellectual skills to succeed in their discipline area	Curriculum and assessment design (Boards of Study)
To provide an innovative and up-to-date curriculum to produce graduates whose subject knowledge is relevant and current	Section 6 of BES learning and teaching strategy (Linking of research to teaching) Maintaining of links to external reference points (professional bodies, employers, wider subject communities)
To develop teaching, learning and assessment strategies which encourage complex learning and enhances employability	Maintenance of currency of pedagogy within subject areas Maintaining and developing links with subject centres

Skilful Practices (S)

To develop subject specific employability skills	Curriculum design (Boards of Study)
To provide opportunities to develop non-subject specific employability skills	Add+vantage scheme
To help and support students in undertaking extra-curricular activities to enhance future employability	Work placements (EPU, employability tutors) Study overseas

Personal qualities (efficacy beliefs) (E)

To make students aware of future potential graduate career paths	Skills/ career development modules (employability tutors) Careers service (employability advisors)
To raise student aspirations in relation to their future career goals	Skills/ career development modules (employability tutors) Careers service (employability advisors)
To provide a positive and supportive environment for students to explore future	Academic support structures

career paths	Careers service (employability advisors)
To ensure that students have the opportunity to develop the employment search skills necessary to achieve their career goals	Skills/ career development modules (employability tutors) Careers service (employability advisors)

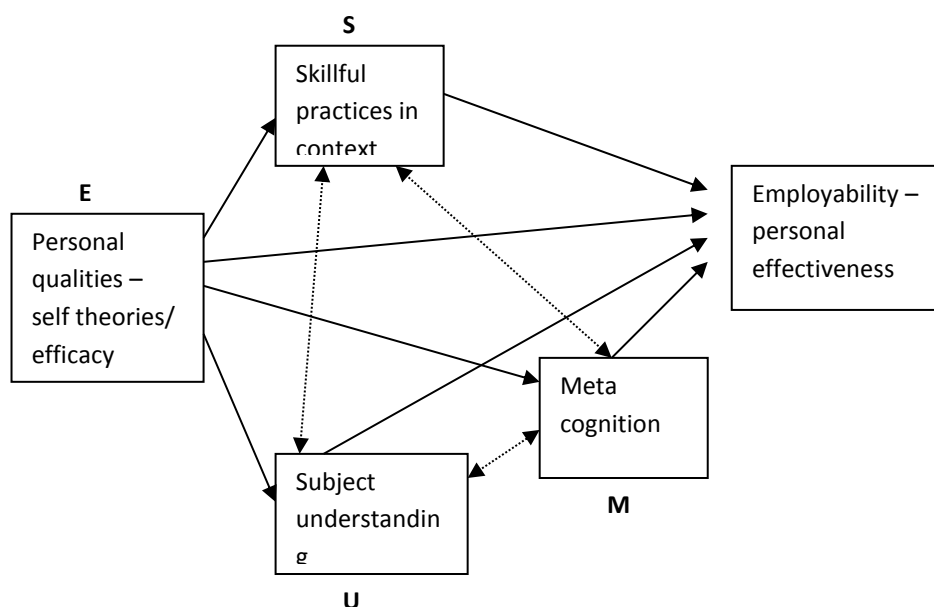
Reflexivity (metacognition) (M)

To provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and future development	Skills/ career development modules (PDP)
To raise student aspirations in relation to their future career goals	Skills/ career development modules (employability tutors) Careers service (employability advisors)
To encourage students to recognise their achievements and the contribution these make to their employability	Skills/ career development modules (PDP) Careers service (employability advisors)

Paul Cashian

Associate Dean (UG Programmes)

Appendix 1 - The USEM model of Employability



Understanding of subject matter, i.e. the degree subject area. To highlight the difference between this 'U' element and the 'S' element it is helpful to distinguish between 'propositional knowledge' and 'process knowledge'. 'U' refers to propositional knowledge or 'knowing that' element of a student's subject understanding.

Skilful Practices refers to process knowledge or 'knowing how'. Process knowledge is acquired through personal experience and will be developed through the acquisition of both course based and non-course based experiences. The model deliberately avoids the term 'skill' as being too narrow

"... what are often called 'skills' are better seen as practices, situated, not necessarily transferable, improved through repetition and assessed with difficulty"

Skilful practices include process knowledge acquired through "co-curriculum and ... extra-curricular engagement"

Efficacy beliefs: Efficacy refers to the belief that you can make an impact on situations and events. In this context it relates to the students self belief, confidence and aspirations for the future, plus staff perceptions of students and their abilities and potential.

Metacognition: this element again draws on psychology and the awareness of what you know, can do and how you can learn more, "... Metacognition is about being mindful and disposed to keep learning"

Useful References

Yorke, Mantz (2007) "Employability and PDP in the HE curriculum", presentation given as part of employability workshop at Coventry University, 18th September 2007

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Knight Peter & Yorke Mantz, (2004), *Learning, curriculum and employability in Higher Education*, Routledge, London and New York p.38

Yorke Mantz, (2004), "Employability in the undergraduate curriculum: some student perspectives, *European Journal of Education*, 39(4)

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FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY
SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN ACHIEVEING A POSITIVE DESTINATION

INTRODUCTION

The Faculty has developed a number of initiatives over the last couple of years aimed at enhancing our student's employability, these include:

- A range of accredited work experience modules at both UG (add+vantage modules) and PG (internship modules)
- The incorporation of career development modules across UG courses and career development sessions on some PG courses
- The establishment, development and investment in a unit specifically aimed at supporting employability across the Faculty (the EPU)
- The increasing number of students we employ within the Faculty in a number of roles
- The development of the Department employability tutor role as a link between the academic content of courses, the EPU and employers
- The embedding of central careers staff within the Faculty to support and help students achieve positive destinations
- A range of employer events hosted through the EPU

All of these initiatives have been successful and in many ways BES has lead the rest of the University in this whole area. The DLHE return for our 2009 graduates also lends some support to the success of our strategy over the last four years. However a number of factors mean that the Faculty needs to review its approach, and shift the emphasis slightly away from the development of generic employability skills and focus more on developing a more individualised approach to helping a student achieve a positive destination. The intention is not to stop doing any of the things above but to develop them further and embed them within a wider framework. We also need to recognise that as the Faculty continues to grow in student numbers we have major problems with the scalability of many of the excellent initiatives listed above – at the moment they only impact on a relatively small proportion of our student body. Other key factors which are driving this review are:

- The increasing importance of the annual DLHE return as a key indicator of the University's (and hence Faculty's) performance. The likelihood is that in the near

future this will not only affect league positions but also may directly affect funding of courses. DLHE is also likely to be extended to cover non-HEFCE students in the near future. This will significantly increase the impact on PG courses many of which overwhelmingly recruit overseas students.

- The University is making a significant change in the way in which careers support is funded within the University with resources being diverted from a central support service to a more devolved Faculty-based approach. Remaining Faculty support will also be located in the new Student Enterprise Building and not the GE and WM buildings. This shift of resources recognises the increasingly fragmented nature of the graduate labour market in terms of market entry and the need for a more sector specific approach through Departments.
- The success of many of the initiatives creates its own problems in terms of the increasing levels of support required and possible overlapping of functions and systems
- The move across the University to a more course-based focus approach to academic development and the introduction of a structured Academic Personal Tutor system (APT,) both being seen as vital to enhancing our student's experience. The focus at the moment is on UG, but PG will not be far behind.

ACHIEVING A POSITIVE DESTINATION

All the evidence points to three factors having a major impact on a student making a successful post-graduation transition to a positive destination (there is a fourth, the state of the external labour market, but this is beyond our control).

1. Achieving a 'good' degree – defined as 1st or 2:1
2. Evidence of relevant work experience or exposure to the workplace (either accredited or unaccredited)
3. Individualised proactive guidance and support

The changes referred to above all impact in some way on these three key factors. The focus over the last 4/5 years within the Faculty has been on employability – providing students with experiences, job related skills and increased awareness of post graduation opportunities. However, we now need to complete this work by helping our students into a positive destination, something which needs to be done at the level of an individual student. The proposal is therefore to make the following changes within BES to reflect this new environment (detailed outlines of roles are provided below):

- To strengthen the EPU in its central work experience role
- To fully integrate UG and PG approaches and shift the focus to Depts

- To cascade and replicate the range of events currently run as cross Faculty events by the EPU ('Spotlight', CV clinics, assessment centres) down into individual Dept events
- To re-focus the Departmental employability tutor's role
- To create a new cross Faculty Employment Coordinator role
- To recognise the need for factor 3 above to be given a central place in the revised APT system at levels 2,3 and at PG

SUMMARY OF REVISED ROLES TO SUPPORT POSITIVE DESTINATIONS

The Employability and Placement Unit

- Co-ordination of accredited UG work experience modules (PG internship modules to remain within the academic Depts to which they are attached)
- To increase the number of students under-taking a work experience in line with Faculty objectives
- Work with the central careers and employability service, Dept employability tutors and the PG internship tutors to source work experience opportunities
- To work with employability tutors and APTs to ensure work experience opportunities are effectively targeted to students who may be potentially interested
- Act as a central repository of all work experience documentation (QAA and Health and Safety requirement)
- Instigate and support work experience preparation activities
- Act as a focal point for employer events and contacts
- Act as a focal point for employment transition activities
- Act as the Faculty contact point for work experience opportunities and ensure that these are effectively targeted to potential student applicant

Departmental Employability Tutors

- To become the source of Departmental expertise for staff and students in relation to the achievement of a positive destination, including :
 - The identification of formal and informal employer related networks
 - The maintenance and enhancement of existing links with employers
 - Working with the EPU to source potential new employer links
 - For UGs, being aware of the PG opportunities available
 - Familiarity with the DLHE return for their Dept
- To provide subject specific employability support and training to APTs e.g. focused CV writing, accessing networks, post-graduation career routes
- To provide informed input into course and curriculum design reflecting actual student destinations
- To work with the employment coordinator in the development of a network of industry-based mentors
- To look after up to 5 sandwich placement students
- To co-ordinate department work experience activity and liaise with the EPU

Additionally all APTs will comply with the new University approach to personal tutoring.

NEW POSTS AND ROLES

Faculty Employment Coordinator

- To contribute to the development of the APT role through
 - The training, development and support of APTs in their employability role
 - Working with the centre on initiatives in the development of the APT role
- To work with the EPU and employability tutors in the development of activities and events to support students and recent graduates in achieving graduate level employment
- To ensure that relevant sector knowledge is embedded at Department level
- To lead on the development of a network of employer-based mentors to work with students
- To coordinate the work and development of the Departmental employability tutors
- Co-ordinating, and contributing to, the development of the Faculty's career development modules offered across our courses
- To take the lead in the identification and disseminate of good practice across the Faculty and to support the development of Department based initiatives
- To co-ordinate the development of networks of external employers to work with Departments and the establishment of Departmental advisory groups
- Acting as the main BES link with the central careers and employability service and ensuring the effective and timely communication of job opportunities to students

Student Employability Champions

- Liaises with the EPU as required, through attendance at regular meetings and events, ensuring punctuality and reliability.
- Attendance at all events hosted by the EPU throughout the 2010-2011 academic calendar, in order to offer peer to peer guidance on employability skills and the placement process.
- Active marketing and promotion of aforementioned events, seeking to build attendance figures and widen participation from their peers.
- To offer feedback and analysis of the EPU events programme within specific focus groups or one to one interviews.
- To set an example for others to follow, by creating partnerships and mentoring relationships with their peers.
- Assistance with EPU marketing techniques, design and implementation.
- Responsibility for some appropriate online marketing through social networking groups.
- Participation as required in some practical aspects of EPU events.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR HELPING STUDENT'S ACHIEVE A POSITIVE DESTINATION

	KEY FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITY
ACHIEVING A 'GOOD' DEGREE	Quality Teaching and Learning	Associate Head
	Simple and clearly defined course structure	Programme Manager
	A structured academic personal tutor system	Associate Head/ Employment Coordinator
	Prompt and regular feedback	Module leaders
	Prompt and clear course support	Support Office
	Creating a supportive learning community	Head of Dept

	KEY FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITY
WORK EXPERIENCE (accredited, unaccredited, internships)	Identification	EPU/ Central Careers service/ employability tutor, internship tutor (PG)
	Communication to students	Dept Employability tutors (UG), internship tutor (PG)
	Preparation	EPU working with Dept Employability tutors (UG) and internship tutor (PG)
	Placement support	Depts. supported by EPU
	Maximising the benefit	APT

	KEY FACTORS	RESPONSIBILITY
INDIVIDUALISED PROACTIVE	Job search skills	Career Dev modules, Employment coordinator

GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT	Labour market familiarity	Career Dev modules, Employment coordinator
	Identification of opportunities	Central careers, EPU
	Showcasing of self	APT
	Prompting and prodding	APT
	CV preparation	APT supported by Employability tutor, Employment coordinator
	Preparation for interview process	APT supported by EPU and Employment coordinator

Paul Cashian

Associate Dean (Student Experience)

7/9/10 –Version 4

FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

TURNING EMPLOYABILITY INTO EMPLOYMENT

Over the last five years the Faculty has put a significant amount of resources into supporting Departments in helping prepare students for entry into the graduate labour market through a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing a student's employability. This has had an impact on the Faculty's DLHE return with a three year upward trend in graduates achieving a positive destination, however we still only have 55% of graduates achieving graduate level employment. The changes and additional resources which are being committed for 2011/12 are specifically targeted at improving our graduate employment rate i.e. translating employability into employment.

Three factors have a major impact on a student making a successful post-graduation transition to a graduate level job (there is a fourth, the state of the external labour market, but this is beyond our control).

4. Achieving a 'good' degree – defined as 1st or 2:1
5. Evidence of relevant work experience or exposure to the workplace (either accredited or unaccredited)
6. Individualised proactive guidance and support

What is becoming increasingly evident is that all three of these factors are of equal importance. A graduate who has a good degree, some work experience plus has had direct guidance and support on how to enter the graduate labour market has a significantly better chance of succeeding. The purpose of this paper is to summarise the structure and roles of Faculty staff involved in enhancing student employability and turning employability into employment (more detailed role descriptions are provided in the appendix).

The Employment Co-ordinator

One weakness of the previous employability structure was a lack of clarity and overlapping of roles and responsibilities. The principle role of the Employment co-ordinator is to provide a clear central focal point for employment support within the Faculty. The Employment co-ordinator ensures that the two main strands to the Faculty's employment strategy (the EPT system and the EPU) operate in a coherent way to maximise the impact on a student's employability and potential for success in the graduate labour market. The employment co-ordinator also acts as a single contact point for the Faculty with the rest of the University, including the central careers and employability service.

The Employability and Placement Unit (EPU)

The primary role of the EPU remains as previously as the main source for supporting students through the range of work experience opportunities open to them. This involves helping to source work experiences, support in preparing for placements, ensuring compliance with health and safety requirements and the QAA code of conduct for placements. One significant change is that non sandwich work experience modules offered through the add⁺vantage scheme are now delivered through the Dept of HR & OB (formerly Dept of HRM). Individual Depts will continue to offer their own sandwich placement modules, however in most cases the visits to students on sandwich placements will be carried out by the EPU. The sandwich placement module leader will however remain the department link for sandwich students. The EPU also acts as a focal point for employment related activities such as employer events, mock assessment centres and providing a base for central careers staff within the Faculty. Increasingly the EPU will also provide support for department-based employment events as these grow in number. The EPU also now has a base in the George Eliot building.

Employment Personal Tutors (EPTs)

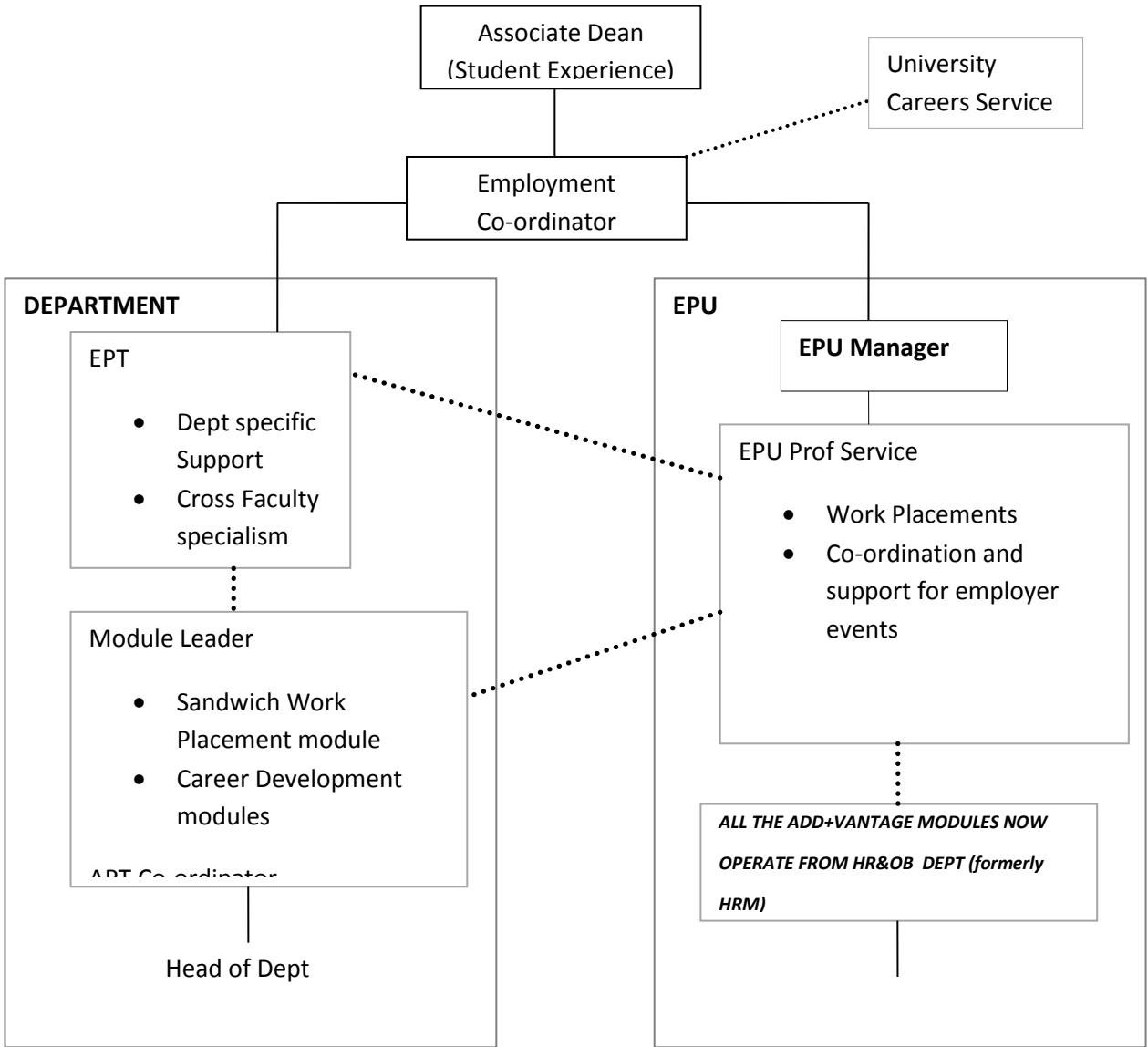
EPTs are central to turning employability into employment. They will complement academic personal tutors in a department's APT system by offering students structured individual specialised support to help them make a successful transition into a graduate occupation. They will be the primary contact for students with respect to employment support and will signpost students to other resources available, for example central careers, IEMS etc, according to their individual needs. The EPTs will be based within departments and work with students right the way through their programme. EPTs will have specialist knowledge in particular sectors of the graduate labour but will operate cross-Faculty for final year students recognising that students go to a range of graduate occupations not always directly linked to their course of study. EPTs will also have a role in developing external employer contacts, organising employer events plus providing some employment-related input into courses through career development modules and course design.

The Department's role

Although the old employability tutor role is largely replaced by the EPT, academic staff will still be responsible for leading career development/ personal development modules, with some input as required from the EPT. Although the EPU will take over the responsibility for all placement visits the expectation is that students on sandwich placements will continue to be required to take a department-based placement module and thus maintain contact with an academic member of staff during their placement.

Paul Cashian - Associate Dean (Student Experience)
Joanne Kleanthous - Faculty Employment Co-ordinator

Appendix 1 – Organisational Structure



Appendix 2 – Detailed Roles

The Employability and Placement Unit

- To support students under-taking a work experience
- To co-ordinate and undertake visits to students on full year sandwich placements
- Work with the central careers and employability service, Dept EPTs and the PG internship tutors to source work experience opportunities
- To act as the Faculty contact point for work experience opportunities and ensure that these are effectively targeted to potential student applicant
- To work with EPTs to ensure work experience opportunities are effectively targeted to students who may be potentially interested
- Act as a central repository of all work experience documentation (QAA and Health and Safety requirement)
- To instigate and support work experience preparation activities
- To act as a central co-ordinating support point for employer events and contacts
- To act as a central co-ordinating support point for employment transition activities

Employment Personal Tutors (EPTs)

- Become the source of expertise for staff and students within the Department/s in relation to the achievement of a positive graduate destination, including:
 - Familiarity with the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) return for their Department
 - For UG's, being aware of the PG opportunities available.
- Take responsibility for providing employment support to a specific group of the Faculty's students. Monitor and record the progress of final year UG and Post-Graduate students in securing a positive destination. Continue to support recent graduates.
- Provide support and guidance to students and recent graduates in seeking and applying for work experience, graduate employment and post-graduate study using a variety of methods, including small group tutorials, 121 sessions, delivery of presentations/ skill development sessions as part of the Department career development modules.
- Develop, maintain and enhance links with graduate employers and department alumni. Proactively develop activities and events utilising these links that enhance students understanding of potential graduate career options, in line with the Faculty employment strategy.
- Work with Department colleagues to engage their support in delivering the employment strategy. Co-ordinate the work of the Student Ambassadors and Student Employability Champions affiliated to the Department.
- Provide informed input into course and curriculum design reflecting actual student destinations.

Faculty Employment Coordinator

- To co-ordinate and develop the employment tutoring elements of the APT role
- To manage the work and development of the Employment Personal Tutors (EPTs)
- To provide strategic direction to the EPU
- To work with the EPU, EPTs and the central careers and employability service in the development of activities and events to support students and recent graduates in achieving graduate level employment
- To ensure that relevant sector knowledge is embedded at Department level
- To take the lead in the identification and disseminate of good practice across the Faculty and to support the development of Department based initiatives
- To facilitate and co-ordinate the development of a network of employer-based mentors to work with students
- Contributing to the development of the Faculty's career development modules offered across our courses
- To co-ordinate the development of networks of external employers to work with Departments and the establishment of Departmental advisory groups